

Clinton's VP pick Tim Kaine: A supporter of war and big business

By Tom Hall
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Clinton's selection of Tim Kaine, the senator and former governor of Virginia, is a clear indication of the right-wing character of Clinton's strategy in the US elections. Clinton is basing her campaign on an appeal to the military/intelligence apparatus and to disaffected sections of the Republican Party on the grounds that she, in contrast to the "unreliable" and "temperamentally unfit" Donald Trump, would make the most reliable commander-in-chief for American imperialism.

In Miami on Saturday, in their first joint appearance since the announcement the previous night, Clinton introduced Kaine as a "progressive." To the extent that this nebulous term signifies support for social reforms, it bears no relation to the actual political record of Kaine, a tried and tested supporter of big business and the military, or of Clinton herself, a war criminal and millionaire representative of Wall Street.

Kaine, who is fluent in Spanish from his time as a Catholic missionary in Honduras in the 1980s, addressed the Miami crowd in both English and Spanish. Although Kaine himself is not Hispanic, the Clinton campaign is evidently hoping to capitalize on Kaine's bilingualism and Catholic faith in order to appeal to Hispanic voters.

More fundamentally, however, the selection of Kaine is an indication of the type of administration that Clinton intends to form if she is elected president. The responsibilities of the vice president have grown tremendously in recent years. No longer a mere political ornament and standby in case of the incapacitation of the president (John Garner, Franklin Roosevelt's first vice president, famously declared that the position was "not worth a bucket of warm piss"), the second in line to the president now routinely plays a major role in activities of the executive branch, in particular the conduct of American foreign policy.

Only last week, President Barack Obama dispatched Joe Biden on an official state visit to Australia to issue bellicose threats against China and to keep Australian imperialism in line with the United States' aggressive posturing against China under the so-called "pivot to Asia." The central role that George W. Bush's vice president, Dick Cheney, played in planning and carrying out the invasion of Iraq in 2003, along with countless other crimes, is well known.

Kaine is a longstanding ally of the military/intelligence

apparatus who sits on the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees. From 2006 to 2010, Kaine served as governor of the state of Virginia, home to the Pentagon and the central offices of the CIA, and a hub for military contractors and related industries. Virginia-based companies held more than \$96 billion in defense contracts in 2012–2013, two years after Kaine left office.

Since entering the Senate in 2013, Kaine has distinguished himself for consistently supporting the foreign policy of the Obama administration. From the indefinite prolonging of the war in Afghanistan to the aggressive posturing against Russia and China, Kaine has either supported the administration or criticized it for not going far enough.

Kaine has also repeatedly called for a congressional resolution officially authorizing war against ISIS in order to lend political legitimacy to a significant expansion of the US war for regime change in Syria. "The framers of the Constitution understood then, as now, that the decision of whether to place citizens in harm's way in defense of this nation—to declare war—must be made by the people through their elected representatives," Kaine declared in a statement last October, after the administration's deployment of US forces to Syria. In other words, Kaine's principal concern is that the war in Syria, a war crime which has turned half of the country into refugees, be provided a pseudo-democratic cover.

Kaine supports the Obama administration's pivot to Asia. He released a statement backing the politically-motivated ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration against Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea, a case brought by the Philippines at the prodding of the United States. Kaine is also a longstanding supporter of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement. While the TPP has been attacked by Bernie Sanders and others on protectionist grounds, its principal aim is to serve as the economic component of the pivot to Asia, creating a trading bloc in the Asia-Pacific region directed against China. However, Kaine has changed his public stance after being named as Clinton's running mate, as Clinton herself has rhetorically moderated her support for the TPP.

Kaine's time as a lay Jesuit missionary in Honduras in the early 1980s is also significant. While there is no evidence that Kaine was directly involved, the entire decade in Central

America was dominated by a series of assassination campaigns and military dictatorships backed by the CIA, including the infamous war of the Contras against the left-nationalist Sandinista regime in neighboring Nicaragua. While many priests were also targeted during this period by government assassination squads, the Catholic Church hierarchy in Latin America was deeply implicated in fingering suspected leftists and anti-government figures.

Kaine is a close friend and ally of big business. As governor, Kaine accepted gifts from executives and corporate lobbyists worth more than \$160,000, including trips in private planes throughout the country, according to a report in the *New York Times*. Many of these gifts were given in exchange for political favors. In one case highlighted by the *Times*, a pharmaceuticals company picked up the tab on Kaine's trip to a summit in Aspen, Colorado shortly after he signed an open letter to the federal Food and Drug Administration, drafted by their lobbyists, on the company's behalf. The scale of corporate bribery in Kaine's administration was so great that the governor kept a "swag room" filled with gifts he received during his term in office.

Kaine slashed social spending while governor of Virginia and oversaw \$4.64 billion in cuts during his four-year term. Kaine's last budget proposal, which was eventually passed with amendments after he left office, called for a 26 percent cut to funding for public colleges and universities and \$419 million in cuts from the state Medicaid budget. Kaine was rewarded for his services with an appointment by Obama to chair the Democratic National Committee, a post he held for two years before running for Senate in 2012.

Kaine is a law-and-order figure who supports the augmenting of the repressive powers of the police. A recent report by Reuters noted that he was a strong backer of "Project Exile," a federal "anti-crime" initiative in Virginia during his tenure as the mayor of Richmond, Virginia's fifth-largest city. A summary of the program on the federal National Institute of Justice's web site describes it as a "sentence enhancement program" that prosecuted felons carrying firearms "in federal courts where they received harsher sentences, no option of bail, and no potential for early release," contributing to the explosion of mass incarceration in the United States.

Kaine was also one of many Senate Democrats who supported prohibiting the sale of firearms to individuals on the government's secret "no-fly list" in the aftermath of the mass shooting in Orlando, an arbitrary measure with anti-democratic implications.

The selection of Kaine is also clearly aligned with Clinton's desire to repudiate any association with the issues of social inequality that dominated her primary contest with Bernie Sanders in favor of appealing to sections of the Republican Party establishment who are opposed to the candidacy of Trump. While a figure with greater "progressive" credentials, such as Massachusetts senator and former banking regulator

Elizabeth Warren, had originally been considered as a gesture to Sanders supporters, Clinton has chosen instead to rely upon Sanders himself to corral them behind her campaign.

Sunday's announcement that Democratic National Committee chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz would resign following the convention, a demand that had been raised in recent months by Sanders in order to provide himself with political cover and promote the illusion that the Democratic Party can be reformed, was undoubtedly the outcome of a behind-the-scenes deal to facilitate this support.

An article published by *Politico* yesterday, titled "Tim Kaine's Republican fan club," collected statements supporting Kaine from Republicans who have either yet to formally endorse Trump or who have publicly sparred with him over the course of the election campaign, including Senators Lindsey Graham, John McCain and Jeff Flake. The article pointed out the close personal relationship between Kaine and Ted Cruz, who refused to formally endorse Trump on the stage of the Republican National Convention. It also noted the central role Kaine had played in forcing a vote in Congress on the Obama administration's nuclear deal with Iran, a demand raised by congressional Republicans.

Kaine is also a devout Catholic and social conservative who opposed abortion rights early on his career, although he has since softened his public stance. While he claims to oppose the death penalty, he allowed several executions to go forward during his term as governor.

The selection of Tim Kaine is a further demonstration that workers will be disenfranchised in the presidential election. No matter who wins the presidency in November, a massive escalation of war, austerity and repression is being prepared.

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