

What “incredibly tough” foreign policy actions is Obama preparing?

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In remarks made over the weekend in Seattle, Democratic vice presidential candidate Joseph Biden warned that Barack Obama, if elected president, would be compelled to take deeply unpopular actions in both domestic and foreign policy within months of taking office.

In closed-door gatherings with two audiences of Democratic Party insiders and fundraisers, Biden forecast a major international crisis in the first six months of an Obama administration.

He compared Obama to John F. Kennedy, the last senator to be elected president. “It will not be six months before the world tests Barack Obama like they did John Kennedy,” Biden said. “The world is looking. We’re about to elect a brilliant 47-year-old senator president of the United States of America. Watch. We’re going to have an international crisis, a generated crisis, to test the mettle of this guy.”

Biden mentioned the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, North Korea and Russia as potential points of conflict, but did not spell out the exact nature of such a crisis, observing, “I can give you at least four or five scenarios from where it might originate.” He made it clear that Obama would respond forcefully: “They’re going to want to test him. And they’re going to find out this guy’s got steel in his spine.”

The most politically significant portion of Biden’s remarks came when he admitted that the decisions of an Obama-Biden administration were likely to be deeply unpopular, and he called on the Democratic Party regulars to stand behind the new president even when public opinion turned against him.

“He’s going to need help,” Biden said. “He’s going to need you—not financially to help him—we’re going to need you to use your influence, your influence within the community, to stand with him. Because it’s not going to be apparent initially, it’s not going to be apparent that we’re right.”

He continued, “There are going to be a lot of you who want to go, ‘Whoa, wait a minute, yo, whoa, whoa, I don’t know about that decision.’ Because if you think the decision is sound when they’re made, which I believe you will when they’re made, they’re not likely to be as popular as they are sound. Because if they’re popular, they’re probably not sound.”

Here is the voice of a longtime representative of the financial aristocracy, voicing his contempt for public opinion—“if decisions are popular, they’re probably not sound”—and warning his wealthy audience that the new Obama-Biden administration will have to defy

public opinion to carry out its policies. Biden's language suggests that the ferocity of the new administration's response will shock not only public opinion, but even its own supporters.

In that context, one must point out Biden's suggestions that nuclear weapons might play a role in one or more of the potential crises. A nuclear-armed Korean Peninsula could lead to "Japan as a nuclear power," he said, which could push China into expanding its nuclear weaponry. The Pakistan-Afghanistan border is "crawling with Al Qaeda" and "Pakistan is already bristling with nuclear weapons, all of which can hit Israel." Biden also noted Iran's alleged drive to build a nuclear weapon.

Foreign policy journals and pundits linked to the Democratic Party have undoubtedly been discussing many such doomsday scenarios, and Biden's language suggests that the use of the US nuclear arsenal, the world's largest, is under consideration by those who are formulating the foreign and military policy of an Obama-Biden administration.

Biden himself has been one of the most hawkish on foreign policy among leading congressional Democrats, backing the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq and advocating a US-led military intervention in Darfur. During the Democratic presidential primary campaign, he was the most vociferous of all the candidates in denouncing antiwar protest groups seeking a cutoff of funds for the war in Iraq.

Biden's expectation of widespread popular hostility to an Obama administration applies not only to foreign and military policy, but to domestic policy. He told the Seattle audience, "I promise you, you all are going to be sitting here a year from now going, 'Oh my God, why are they there in the polls, why is the polling so down, why is this thing so tough?' We're going have to make some incredibly tough decisions in the first two years."

The Democratic candidate did not spell out the exact nature of these "incredibly tough decisions," other than to refer to the financial and economic crisis and two wars being bequeathed by the Bush administration to its successor.

In the wake of these blunt and ominous comments, there have been disingenuous attempts to explain them away from both parties.

Republican presidential candidate John McCain seized on the suggestion that foreign enemies might seek to test an inexperienced President Obama, citing his own military and foreign policy expertise going back more than 50 years. Right-wing pundits went further, suggesting, as one put it, that "Biden is forecasting inaction by Obama in the face of testing by a dictator."

This interpretation is preposterous, especially given Biden's own record as a fervent supporter of US military intervention. Obama's selection of the Delaware senator as his running mate was itself an effort to reassure the political establishment of his commitment to defend the interests of American imperialism by military force.

The Obama campaign sought to shrug off Biden's remarks as a mere historical generalization, triggered by the Obama-Kennedy analogy, not a prediction of impending crisis. A campaign spokesman said Biden was referring to Kennedy's confrontation with Soviet President Nikita Khrushchev in summit talks in Vienna, a few months after he took office—although these talks took place after a US military provocation—the invasion of Cuba

by US-trained exiles who were defeated at the Bay of Pigs.

An Obama administration would not be an “innocent abroad,” picked on by dictators out to “test the mettle” of a US president. American imperialism continues from administration to administration, Democratic or Republican. If elected, Obama will take office heading the world’s largest military machine, engaged in violent provocations in dozens of countries, any of which could flare up unexpectedly, especially under the impact of the deepening world economic crisis.

Obama won the Democratic presidential nomination by presenting himself as the more consistent antiwar candidate, and the Democratic ticket in public pledges to end the war in Iraq and adopt a less militaristic stance. But behind closed doors, before select audiences of the financial and political elite, Biden has given a glimpse of the real perspective of the Democratic wing of American imperialism.

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