

Amid Massive Police Presence, Republican National Convention Pushes Law-and-order, Militarism

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The Republican National Convention opened Monday at the Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland with security reminiscent of a military occupation. The delegates quickly ratified a rules committee report ensuring that delegates pledged to vote for Donald Trump will be bound to vote for him on the first ballot, and then adopted an ultra-right party platform.

Over the next few days the convention will officially endorse Trump, who is scheduled to accept the nomination on Thursday.

The theme of the first day was “Make America Safe Again,” with a focus on attacking immigrants, militarism and expanding the powers of the police. Speeches inside the convention in support of a wall with Mexico, increased police-state measures and an assault on democratic rights were mirrored outside by the deployment of thousands of police, miles of barricades and even the National Guard.

The convention has been declared a National Special Security Event, making all security operations subordinate to the Secret Service and the Department of Homeland Security. Cleveland has been given a federal grant of \$50 million to cover equipment and personnel expenses. Some 500 city police officers are to be joined by 1,500 officers from other law enforcement agencies across the state and 3,000 federal agents. An undisclosed number of National Guard troops will also be on standby under the direction of the US Northern Command, which was formed in 2002 to facilitate domestic deployment of the military.

Anticipating protests, Cleveland has acquired 2,000 sets of riot gear with batons and prepared 1,000 beds in local jails for mass arrests. The police have added AR-15 semi-automatic rifles, sniper teams and armored cars to their arsenal.

Particularly following the murder of five police officers in Dallas, Texas on July 7 and three more in Baton Rouge, Louisiana ten days later, police are taking extreme measures. Ohio allows the open carry of firearms, which has led to some police associations to call for emergency orders suspending existing laws.

Stephen Loomis, president of the Cleveland Police Patrolmen’s Association, sent a letter to Ohio governor and former primary opponent of Trump, John Kasich, asking him to use an executive order to ban openly carrying firearms around the convention. Loomis told CNN: “I don’t care if it’s constitutional or not at this point. They can fight about it after the RNC, or they can lift it after the RNC, but I want him to absolutely outlaw open-carry in Cuyahoga County until this RNC is over.” Kasich declined the request.

The speakers within the convention are a significant departure from prior years. Many senior Republican officials have refused to participate, including Kasich and both living, former Republican presidents, George H.W. Bush and his son George W. Bush. While some leading Republicans have refused to endorse Trump, only a small number are opposing his nomination.

A minority of delegates, led by Senator Mike Lee of Utah and former Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli, tried to force a roll-call vote on the rules of the convention with the distant hope of allowing an initial free vote for pledged delegates. Trump's nomination would have remained likely, but it would no longer have been automatic. They were shouted down by the majority, and the rules of the convention were accepted with a voice vote.

In the place of more established Republican officials are obscure actors like Scott Baio, once well-known for playing Chachi on the 1970s sitcom "Happy Days," lower-ranking office-holders looking to make a name for themselves, and politicians long out of office like former New York City mayor (1993-2001) Rudy Giuliani.

Giuliani delivered a fascistic rant late in the evening, summed up in his pledge to Islamic extremists: "You know who you are, and we are coming to get you!"

Significantly, David Clarke, the Sheriff of Milwaukee County, was one of the prime-time speakers Monday night. In a series of interviews and an opinion piece published in *The Hill*, Clarke, who is himself African-American, declared that the United States is currently in a civil war against Black Lives Matter protesters, who he compared to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In his speech, he denounced protests against police violence as "anarchy."

While few police chiefs openly express Clarke's views, the militarized response to protesters around the convention demonstrated a clear practical agreement.

Both Donald Trump and the Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton, are despised by broad layers of the American population. Polls show Trump with a disapproval rating just below 60 percent while Clinton has a disapproval rating of 56 percent. Roughly a third of Americans approve of neither. Under conditions of broad disaffection with both political parties, the state feels the need to ensure compliance through an increasingly militarized police force.

The Democratic convention is scheduled to open in Philadelphia on July 25. The federal government has set aside a similar sum of \$43.1 million for its security.

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