

Bernie Sanders: Silent partner of American militarism

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Bernie Sanders now leads frontrunner Hillary Clinton in polls of Democratic voters in New Hampshire, the first state to hold a primary, and he is closing the gap in Iowa, the first caucus state, and in national polling as well. The Vermont senator continues to attract large crowds, favorable media attention (including a flattering front-page report in the *New York Times* August 21), and a flood of campaign contributions.

The flaccid and unimaginative media punditry has largely ignored a significant void in the Sanders campaign. The White House aspirant has offered not the slightest hint of what he would do as commander in chief. Four months into the campaign, Sanders makes little or no reference to foreign and military policy in his stump speech. The subject of foreign policy is not even addressed on the Sanders campaign web site, which lists 10 topics, all of them concerned with domestic policy.

A report on Yahoo News August 24 raises the question of “How President Bernie Sanders would handle foreign policy.” It begins by taking note of this curious fact: “Bernie Sanders, the Independent senator from Vermont, has a special ‘War and Peace’ section on his official website, detailing his views on issues like Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East peace process. Bernie Sanders, the contender for the Democratic presidential nomination ... doesn’t.”

The report goes on to detail the positions that Sanders has taken on a range of foreign policy issues, based on his voting record as a congressman and senator. His profile is typical of liberal Democrats, supporting the Clinton administration’s war against Serbia in 1999 and the Bush administration’s invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, while voting against the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and the Authorization for the Use of Military Force against Iraq in 2002. Sanders criticized Obama’s

bombing of Libya in 2011—mainly because he did not seek congressional authorization—but backed his bombing of Iraq and Syria in 2014.

Sanders is a down-the-line supporter of the state of Israel, repeatedly endorsing Israeli onslaughts against the Gaza Strip, most recently the savage bombardment of July-August 2014 which killed nearly 2,000 Palestinians, including more than 500 children. At an August 2014 town hall meeting, Sanders notoriously demanded that audience members “shut up” when they questioned his support for Israel’s criminal actions.

He is a vociferous opponent of China in both economic and foreign policy, and backed the US intervention in Ukraine to foment a coup spearheaded by fascist elements to overthrow the pro-Russian government and set up a pro-Western stooge regime. “The entire world has got to stand up to Putin,” Sanders declared last year, at a time when the warmongering campaign in the US and European media was at its height.

Yahoo News summed up the candidate’s foreign policy profile as follows: “The picture that emerges is less that of a firebrand anti-war radical than a pragmatic liberal who regards military force as a second choice in almost any situation—but a choice that sometimes must be made.”

CBS News, in a profile of Sanders last week, noted his general alignment with the foreign policy of the Obama administration, including its war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, its nuclear agreement with Iran, and its decision to normalize relations with Cuba.

The continued silence of Sanders on foreign and military policy has become something of an embarrassment to some of his left-liberal supporters. In a commentary published earlier this month on the web

site of Al Jazeera America, media critic Norman Solomon, after expressing enthusiastic support for Sanders on domestic and economic issues, complained of the candidate's refusal to address issues of militarism and military spending.

Solomon continues: "The same omissions were on display at an Iowa Democratic Party annual dinner on July 17, when Sanders gave a compelling speech but made no reference to foreign affairs. Hearing him talk, you wouldn't have a clue that the United States is in its 14th year of continuous warfare. Nor would you have the foggiest inkling that a vast military budget is badly limiting options for the expanded public investment in college education, infrastructure, clean energy and jobs that Sanders is advocating."

Sanders is not only generally aligned with Obama administration foreign policy, he has refused to specify a single weapons program or Pentagon project that he would cut or eliminate if elected in 2016. He is a longstanding backer of the most expensive US weapons program, the \$1.4 trillion F-35 fighter jet, some of which are to be based in Burlington, Vermont, his hometown.

The so-called "socialist" has voted repeatedly for vast Pentagon appropriations bills, maintaining funding of the wars he was (rhetorically) opposed to, as well as funding for the CIA, NSA and the rest of the vast American intelligence apparatus, the infrastructure for police-state spying against the American people.

So right-wing is his record on foreign and military policy that even his most craven apologists, the pseudo-left groups Socialist Alternative and the International Socialist Organization, have been compelled to complain about it, although this has not stopped them hailing the Sanders campaign as a huge advance and openly supporting a candidate for the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party.

In a lengthy profile of Sanders, Dan LaBotz of the ISO describes Sanders' foreign policy views as "a big problem," adding, "What this record makes clear is that Sanders has no consistent and principled position against US imperialism." This is a gross distortion: Sanders is a longtime proven defender of US imperialism, not a half-hearted or inconsistent opponent.

LaBotz continues: "Sanders' program makes no mention of the military. While he calls himself a

socialist, Sanders' foreign policy and military policy remain in line with corporate capitalism, militarism, and imperialism."

In other words, Sanders has nothing in common with the internationalist principles on which genuine socialism is based. He is cut from the same cloth as Tony Blair, the British "Labor" prime minister who was the junior partner of George W. Bush in perpetrating the criminal war in Iraq, and François Hollande, the French "Socialist" president who is Obama's junior partner in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and throughout Africa.



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