

Sanders backs US aggression in the Middle East

Patrick Martin
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On the eve of Tuesday's first televised debate among the candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination, the two poll leaders, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, have gone out of their way to express support for the Obama administration's military interventions in the Middle East.

They are solidarizing themselves with US imperialist aggression in the region under conditions where American policy in Iraq and Syria has produced an unmitigated debacle, with the growing threat of a wider war involving major powers, including Russia, whose nuclear arsenal is second only to Washington's.

Moreover, the main pretext for the Obama administration's escalation in Iraq and Syria, the so-called war on terror, has been completely exploded by the open alliance of Washington with the al-Nusra Front, the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, which the US government itself declares a terrorist organization, against the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Clinton has called for a more aggressive military posture in Syria, including the imposition of a no-fly zone, potentially bringing US military forces into direct conflict with Russian warplanes now flying missions in support of the Assad regime.

This is consistent with the policies that Clinton advocated as secretary of state, when she pushed for direct US intervention to overthrow the Assad government in 2011-2012, only to be overruled by Obama, who opted for a more cautious and indirect policy using the CIA and US allies such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Clinton is a long-time representative and defender of US imperialism, going back to the administration of her husband, which bombed Serbia and Iraq, waged war in

Somalia and sent the Marines into Haiti. As a US senator, Clinton voted for the war in Afghanistan in 2001 and for the war in Iraq in 2002.

Sanders, for his part, embraced the White House Mideast policy wholeheartedly in an interview taped Friday for broadcast on NBC's Sunday program "Meet the Press." He told interviewer Chuck Todd, "I think what the president has tried to do is thread a very, very difficult needle. And that is, keep American troops from engaging in combat and getting killed there. And I think that is the right thing to do. So I think we continue to try to do everything that we can, focusing primarily, by the way, as bad as Assad is, focusing on trying to defeat ISIS."

While opposing the use of American ground forces, at least for the present, Sanders was enthusiastically in favor of soldiers from other countries "engaging in combat and getting killed" in the wars in Syria and Iraq. "I believe very strongly that Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, you know what?" he said. "They're going to have to get their hands dirty as well. They don't like ISIS? Let them start putting troops on the ground."

This exchange followed:

Todd: Gulf War one, we got them to pay for—do you think we should be doing that?

Sanders: I think it's more than pay.

Todd: You want to see them put blood and treasure?

Sanders: Yeah. That's exactly right.

After expressing the desire that Arab soldiers fight and die in Syria (doing the "dirty work" for US imperialism), Sanders went on to declare his support for another Obama policy: assassination by drone-fired missiles.

Asked whether he favored using drones and Special Forces for counterterrorism, Sanders responded, "Well,

all of that and more.”

He continued, “Look, we all know, you know, that there are people as of this moment plotting against the United States. We have got to be vigorous in protecting our country, no question about it.”

In another portion of the interview, Sanders reiterated his false claim to the label “socialist.” It is impossible to combine socialism and support for imperialism and its wars, let alone pledge, as Sanders has repeatedly, to defend “America’s vital strategic interests.” Those are the interests of corporate America, the interests of the millionaires and billionaires whom Sanders demagogically claims to oppose, but whose global dominance he vows to safeguard as commander-in-chief.

The unanimity of the Democratic presidential field when it comes to the central issue of war—under conditions of mounting global conflicts between the US and Russia over Ukraine and now Syria, and between the US and China over the South China Sea—only underscores the fraud of the corporate-controlled two-party system in the United States.

Both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party pledge to defend the global interests of Wall Street and maintain the dominant world role of the US military-intelligence apparatus. No candidate in either party speaks for the vast majority of working people in America, who are opposed to war and militarism.

Here a critical role is played by the pseudo-left groups such as the International Socialist Organization, Socialist Alternative and the various Stalinist and ex-Stalinist organizations, all of which orbit around the Democrats. They are seeking to use the Sanders campaign to pump up illusions in this discredited right-wing party of imperialism. In pursuit of this goal, they cover up for Sanders’ support for Obama’s wars in Iraq and Syria.

When it was a Republican in the White House acting as the frontman for the military-intelligence apparatus, these groups were happy to spout anti-war rhetoric and posture as opponents of US imperialism. Now that it is a Democrat signing the orders for drone missile assassinations, bombings and the dispatch of military forces, the pseudo-left groups have fallen into line: in Libya, in Iraq and now in Syria. The only complaint of the pseudo-left groups is that, like Hillary Clinton, they feel Obama has been insufficiently aggressive in

intervening in Syria against the Assad regime.

These organizations, representing more privileged layers of the middle class, long ago abandoned any opposition to imperialism. They are now pro-imperialist and pro-war, and bear primary political responsibility for the absence of an organized anti-war movement despite mass popular anti-war sentiment.

The pro-war lineup of the Democratic presidential candidates and their pseudo-left apologists underscores the need to build an anti-war movement on an entirely new political basis: the independent mobilization of the working class, in the United States and internationally, to oppose militarism and imperialist war by fighting for the socialist overthrow of the root cause of war, capitalism.



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