

Bernie Sanders endorses Obama's decision to keep troops in Afghanistan

Patrick Martin
19 October 2015

In a television interview Sunday, Democratic presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders made his most categorical statements yet of his willingness to use military force in support of the foreign policy goals of American imperialism.

Speaking on the ABC program “This Week with George Stephanopoulos,” the Vermont senator gave his backing to Obama’s decision this week to keep nearly 10,000 troops in Afghanistan through the end of 2016, and at least 5,000 troops indefinitely. He also refused to define any circumstances in which he would rule out the unilateral use of military force.

Reacting to the Taliban takeover of the key city of Kunduz in northern Afghanistan, a debacle for the troops of the US puppet regime in Kabul, Obama reversed his previous decision to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by the end of next year.

In response to a direct question about whether he backed the decision to keep nearly 10,000 troops on the battlefield of a war that has gone on for more than 14 years, Sanders responded: “Well, yeah, I won’t give you the exact number. Clearly, we do not want to see the Taliban gain more power, and I think we need a certain nucleus of American troops present in Afghanistan to try to provide the training and support the Afghan Army needs.”

Stephanopoulos then asked about the candidate’s statements during last Tuesday’s Democratic presidential debate in Las Vegas on the use of US military force, when Sanders pointed to his vote to authorize the Afghanistan war in 2001 as proof that he was willing to use force. What were the circumstances in which “a President Sanders would authorize unilateral action to use force,” the ABC anchorman asked?

Sanders replied, “Well, I’m not going to get into

hypotheticals.” Then the following exchange took place:

SANDERS: I think sensible foreign policy and military policies suggest that it cannot be the United States of America alone which solves all of the world’s military...

STEPHANOPOULOS: In all circumstances?

SANDERS: Well, of course, you know, I’m not saying, you know, I don’t want to get into hypotheticals. I didn’t say in all circumstances.

In other words, pressed on his rhetorical commitment to form military-diplomatic coalitions to pursue US foreign policy goals, Sanders declined to set limits on what he as president might do unilaterally. The supposed advocate of “democratic socialism” and “political revolution” fell back on a standard talking point of would-be commanders-in-chief for US imperialism.

“I don’t want to get into hypotheticals” simply means, “I want a free hand to use force whenever the military-intelligence apparatus demands it.”

While Sanders was happy to denounce George W. Bush’s decision to go war in Iraq as one of the worst decisions ever made in US foreign policy, he made no reference to the devastation created by Barack Obama’s interventions in Libya, Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan.

Sanders is in no sense an “antiwar” candidate. He uses demagogic condemnations of “millionaires and billionaires” and the growth of social inequality to appeal to working people and young people who *are* deeply opposed to American militarism, but only to divert their attention from the growing danger of imperialist war. His support for the policy of the ruling class abroad exposes his pretense of opposing the policy of this same ruling class within the United

States.

Even on the infrequent occasions when he has discussed the disastrous consequences of US policy in the Middle East, it is only from the standpoint of American nationalism, not genuine opposition to imperialist war. Once in a while, Sanders bemoans the casualties suffered by American troops or the waste of resources better used at home, but he has never indicated any sympathy for the people of the countries targeted for destruction by US military interventions.

His comments Sunday on Afghanistan were typical. Sanders made no mention of the latest atrocity there by US forces, the deliberate bombing of the Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, which killed at least 22 people: three doctors, nine other staff of the aid agency, and ten patients.

His silence is only part of a much broader policy, observed by all the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates, who despite their incessant mudslinging maintain a united front in covering up for the war crimes carried out by the US military.

In this they are joined by the corporate-controlled media, which has largely ignored the revelations—reported by the Associated Press and then dropped—that US special operations forces were well aware of the hospital's existence and location, and deliberately targeted it for incineration by an AC-130 helicopter gunship.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)