Bernie Sanders lines up with Middle East war drive

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At the Democratic presidential debate held Saturday night in Des Moines, Iowa, self-proclaimed "socialist" Bernie Sanders stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Hillary Clinton in pledging support for US military action in Syria and Iraq, in the name of fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The debate began with a moment of silence for the victims of the terrorist attacks in Paris that killed at least 129 people, barely 24 hours before. The three candidates—Sanders, Clinton and former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley—were then asked to declare their solidarity with French imperialism and their support for its anticipated military response to the atrocities in Paris.

Clinton seized the opportunity to pile up adjectives denouncing ISIS as a "barbaric, ruthless, violent, jihadist, terrorist group," adding that "the 2016 election is not only about electing a president. It's also about choosing our next commander in chief."

Sanders then criticized Clinton's vote in 2002 to give authorization to the Bush administration to wage war against Iraq, declaring, "I don't think any sensible person would disagree that the invasion of Iraq led to the massive level of instability we are seeing right now."

He went on to characterize the invasion of Iraq as "one of the worst foreign policy blunders in the modern history of United States." This language is noteworthy because it does not characterize the unprovoked US aggression against Iraq as a crime, only as a mistake.

Sanders claims (at least rhetorically) to support prosecution of bankers for their role in the 2008 Wall Street crash, but he has never called for prosecution of US officials for their gross violations of international law in the invasion of Iraq. There is no mystery about the discrepancy: any war crimes prosecution could not

be limited to Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld, but would have to include the congressional Democrats who backed the illegal war and the Obama administration officials who continued it once they took office in 2009. Sanders, moreover, has no fundamental differences with the imperialist policy pursued by the Obama White House.

In the course of nearly half an hour of discussion of foreign policy and the Middle East, Sanders repeatedly professed his agreement with the views expressed by Clinton and O'Malley: "I agree with much of what—the secretary and—and the governor have said" … "the secretary's obviously right" … and his two rivals for the Democratic nomination made similar affirmations in response.

At one point, Sanders reiterated a particularly sinister and reactionary formulation that has cropped up frequently in his speeches: the demand that the Muslim Arab countries allied with American imperialism should supply the ground forces needed to conquer the territory now controlled by ISIS in eastern Syria and western Iraq.

He argued, "Here's something that I believe we have to do is we put together an international coalition. And that is we have to understand that the Muslim nations in the region, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Jordan, all of these nations, they're gonna just have to get their hands dirty, their boots on the ground. They are gonna have to take on ISIS."

In other words, it is better that Arabs rather than Americans should die for the defense of the interests of American imperialism. Arab youth and workers listening to such a declaration would be justified in thinking that Senator Sanders wants the Arabs to kill each other for the benefit of Washington.

Sanders summed up his view of the crisis in the

Middle East, which does not deviate from the imperialist consensus by so much as a millimeter. He denounced ISIS and Al Qaeda as "a danger to modern society," adding, "this world with American leadership can and must come together to destroy them. We can do that."

From beginning to end, Sanders accepts and defends the basic lie of American foreign policy, that the US military is waging a "war on terror" in the Middle East. In fact, ISIS and Al Qaeda are themselves the creation of American imperialism, the most reactionary and destructive force on the planet. Al Qaeda was created by the US intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s, ISIS by the US intervention in Iraq and Syria over the past dozen years.

These organizations are not merely byproducts of misbegotten military adventures, but were directly organized and utilized at critical junctures by Washington. It was the CIA that brought Saudi Islamists like Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan in the 1980s. It was the CIA that recruited similar forces to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and then attempt to overthrow Bashar al-Assad in Syria, giving rise to ISIS in both countries.

Sanders concluded the discussion of the Middle East with the suggestion that the United States greatly increase its military spending on the fight against ISIS and Al Qaeda. He said: "Let me pick up an issue that—a very important issue that we have not yet discussed. This nation is the most powerful military in the world. We're spending over $600 billion a year on the military. And yet significantly less than 10 percent of that money is used to be fighting international terrorism."

He continued, "I think we need major reform in the military making it more cost effective but also focusing on the real crisis that faces us. The Cold War is over and our focus has got to be on intelligence, increased manpower, fighting international terrorism."

This is an argument for spending billions more on the NSA, the CIA, the Special Operations death squads of the Pentagon and drone warfare around the world.

In other words, this so-called "socialist" is nothing more than an imperialist in sheep's clothing, advocating the build-up of precisely those instruments of the military-intelligence apparatus that are the most dangerous to the democratic rights of the American people, and have the bloodiest record of atrocities against the population of the world.

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