

Fear-mongering and war dominate third Democratic presidential debate

Andre Damon
21 December 2015

The third Democratic Party debate of the 2016 presidential election campaign was a spectacle of militarism and right-wing fear-mongering, with all three Democratic candidates reaffirming their support for the “war on terror” and pledging to “destroy” the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Saturday’s debate, the first since the December 2 attacks in San Bernardino, California that killed 14 people, focused largely on counter-terrorism and the US military operations in the Middle East.

The media and US political establishment have seized upon the San Bernardino attack, as well as the November 13 attacks in Paris that killed 130 people, to reorient American politics around the bogus narrative of the “war on terror,” with all domestic questions taking the back seat.

To this end, the word “inequality,” the supposed watchword of the campaign of Senator Bernie Sanders, was uttered only once during the debate, while “terror” and its variants were uttered 31 times and “ISIS” was mentioned 73 times.

But even the repeated declarations of support for the “war on terror” by Sanders were not enough for the American media, with the *New York Times* bemoaning the fact that “he made fighting terrorism sound like an afterthought.”

The *Times* declared that Sanders’ “progressive political message, so popular with liberals for much of 2015, now seems lost in a fog of fear. Americans are more anxious about terrorism than income inequality. They want the government to target the Islamic State more than Wall Street executives and health insurers.”

In fact, the “fog of fear” is entirely the creation of the US media and political establishment, which have falsely declared that the attack in San Bernardino, in a country that averages one mass shooting per day, has

suddenly and entirely shifted the axis of popular sentiment.

The debate between Sanders, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley underscored the fact that the mass opposition to war that exists in the American population does not find reflection in the programs of any of the candidates running in the 2016 election. This includes Sanders, whose support for both the war in Afghanistan and the bombing of Libya was pointed out during the debate.

Clinton opened the debate with a statement pledging to “keep our families safe” from terrorism. She declared that she has a “strategy to combat and defeat ISIS without getting us involved in another ground war.”

Clinton presented herself as a more effective commander in chief than her prospective Republican adversaries because she is free of far-right ideological baggage. To this end, Clinton included in her brief opening remarks a jab at her “Republican counterparts,” who “would—despite all their tough talk about terrorism—continue to let people who are on the no-fly list buy guns.”

Clinton was referring to secret lists kept by US intelligence agencies of those allegedly suspected of terrorism. Among those named on no-fly lists were the musician formerly known as Cat Stevens, Senator Edward Kennedy and Representative John Lewis, as well as prominent journalists.

Clinton also called on technology companies to work with the US government to spy on the Internet and social media activity of their customers and turn this information over to the government.

She declared, “We have to do the best possible job of sharing intelligence and information. That now includes

the Internet...That means we have to work more closely with our great tech companies. They can't see the government as an adversary, we can't see them as obstructionists. We've got to figure out how we can do more to understand who is saying what and what they're planning."

In his opening statement, Sanders declared, "I'm running for president because I want a new foreign policy—one that takes on ISIS, one that destroys ISIS" and that "works around a major coalition of wealthy and powerful nations supporting Muslim troops on the ground."

Clinton took the warmongering a step further, reiterating her earlier calls for the establishment of a no-fly zone in Syria.

All three Democrats echoed US President Barack Obama's position on the Syria conflict: that the US should seek to achieve its geopolitical goals in the region, including the ouster of pro-Russian Syrian president Assad, through the use of regional proxy forces, including Saudi Arabia and other US allies in the region.

To that end, Sanders declared, "I believe that countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar have got to step up to the plate, have got to contribute the money that we need, and the troops that we need, to destroy ISIS with American support."

The aim of this policy, supported by the White House and all three Democratic candidates, is to keep the United States from getting bogged down in a ground war in the Middle East in order to free up resources for the anti-China policy known as the "pivot to Asia," and to prepare for conflicts in Europe with Russia.

This goes hand and hand with the abandonment of pretensions to ameliorate poverty and social distress at home. Clinton made this particularly clear in Saturday's debate, declaring, "I don't think we should be imposing new big programs that are going to raise middle class families' taxes."

The atmosphere of fear and warmongering allowed Clinton to shift even further to the right on domestic issues, going so far as to flaunt her close ties to Wall Street for which Sanders had earlier criticized her.

Asked by a moderator, "Should corporate America love Hillary Clinton?", she replied, "Everybody should," declaring "I want to be the president for the struggling, the striving and the successful," and "I want

to be a partner with the private sector."

Saturday's debate made abundantly clear that the Democratic Party is a right-wing, pro-war outfit, entirely hostile to the interests of the working class and bent on a militarist path that, unless opposed by the working class, can only lead to world war.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact