

Sanders backs Obama “kill list,” troops to Syria

A reporter
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Towards the end of a town hall meeting in Philadelphia broadcast last Monday night over MSNBC, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders declared his support for the Obama administration’s program of assassination by drone-fired missiles and its steady build-up of US troop strength in Syria and Iraq.

These statements underscore the unity across the bourgeois political spectrum, among all the presidential candidates of the Democratic and Republican parties, in favor of stepped-up military intervention in the Middle East, including the use of drones that have killed thousands of civilians.

The discussion was initiated by a 29-year-old Sanders supporter, not by MSNBC host Chris Hayes, the moderator of the town hall—a significant fact, since no journalist for the corporate-controlled media has pressed any of the candidates about drone missile assassinations or other lawless actions by the Obama administration.

The questioner, Miguel Garces, was clearly skeptical about Obama’s claim to legal authority to conduct indiscriminate air strikes against targets supposedly linked to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The exchange went as follows:

Question: Senator Sanders, you said that you think that the US air strikes are authorized under current law, but does that mean that the US military can lawfully strike ISIS-affiliated groups in any country around the world?

Sanders: No, it does not mean that. I hope, by the way, that we will have an authorization passed by the Congress, and I am prepared to support that authorization if it is tight enough so I am satisfied that we do not get into a never-ending perpetual war in the Middle East. That I will do everything I can to avoid. But the president, no president, has the ability willy-

nilly to be dropping bombs or using drones any place he wants.

Hayes then intervened to press Sanders on whether he was actually expressing a disagreement with current US government policy in relation to air strikes and drone warfare:

Hayes: The current authorization which you cite in what Miguel just quoted, which is the authorization to use military force after 9/11—that has led to the kill list. This president—

literally, there is a kill list. There is a list of people that the US government wants to kill, and it goes about doing it. Would you keep the kill list as president of the United States?

Sanders: Look, terrorism is a very serious issue. There are people out there who want to kill Americans, who want to attack this country, and I think we have a lot of right to defend ourselves. I think as Miguel said, though, it has to be done in a constitutional, legal way.

Hayes: Do you think what’s being done now is constitutional and legal?

Sanders: In general, I do, yes.

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After obtaining confirmation that Sanders supports Obama’s drone warfare as “constitutional and legal,” Hayes asked about Obama’s announcement Monday morning that the Pentagon would greatly increase the number of Special Forces deployed to Syria—an action that is illegal under international law, since the Syrian government has not given Washington permission to do so.

Sanders replied, “Here’s the bottom line. ISIS has got to be destroyed.” While emphasizing that he favored the use of Muslim Arab ground troops, rather than American troops, except as “advisers” and

“trainers,” Sanders reiterated, “We have had some success in the last year or so putting ISIS on the defensive. We’ve got to continue that effort.”

Sanders made similar comments during an interview Sunday on the CNN program “State of the Union,” telling host Jake Tapper that he would support legislation providing a new authorization for the use of military force in Iraq and Syria, giving a new legal basis for the military operations that now involve more than 5,000 US troops in the two countries.

These statements do not represent a shift in the candidate’s positions on war and violence, but their open, public repetition underscores the political reality: Bernie Sanders is an imperialist politician, a defender of the global interests of the very “millionaires and billionaires” he claims to oppose.

The entire MSNBC exchange with Sanders can be viewed here, starting at 35 minutes and 20 seconds.



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