

Washington Post war hawk Jackson Diehl lauds Sanders' foreign policy

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With Bernie Sanders leading in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, provoking a coordinated campaign against him by the Democratic Party establishment and media pundits, a dissenting note has come from what would seem to be an unlikely source. Jackson Diehl, the deputy foreign policy editor of the *Washington Post* and notorious war hawk, devoted his weekly column Monday to praise of Sanders' foreign policy.

In his column, headlined "The Sanders foreign policy you don't know about," Diehl writes:

A look at Sanders's speeches and statements in recent years provides a different picture, at least in foreign policy. What emerges is a politician strongly shaped by his opposition to US military interventions abroad, but also by a conviction that the United States should do what it can to support democracy and resist authoritarianism. That distinguishes him sharply not only from Trump but also from some of the Democratic candidates cast as moderates.

In the mouths of supporters of American imperialism such as Diehl, phrases like "support democracy" and "resist authoritarianism" are euphemisms for defending the global geopolitical and economic interests of the US corporate-financial oligarchy.

In promoting his supposed antiwar credentials, Sanders has made much of his vote in 2002 against the invasion of Iraq. That, however, stands out as the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, following the US invasion, Sanders continued to vote for US military budgets that funded the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Diehl, who strongly supported the invasion and

occupation of Iraq and has repeatedly advocated a more aggressive US intervention in Syria and the broader Middle East, is not particularly bothered by Sanders' stance on the Iraq War. He hones in on Sanders' 2017 foreign policy speech, staged in Fulton, Missouri, the site of Winston Churchill's 1946 Iron Curtain speech, which inaugurated the Cold War against the Soviet Union. He writes:

Sanders paid homage to Churchill, saying he "strongly agree[d]" with his famous precept that "democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms." He then outlined a global role for the United States as a "champion" of "the values of freedom, democracy and justice."

In that speech, Sanders also praised Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson, the architects of the Korean and Vietnam wars. He issued a threat to Russia, saying, "Today I say to Mr. Putin: We will not allow you to undermine American democracy or democracies around the world."

Diehl, an unreconstructed "liberal" Cold War anticommunist, essentially makes the case the Sanders stands in the same camp. He writes:

As for the former Soviet Union, he [Sanders] told the *New York Times* it "was an authoritarian dictatorship, and that's what I believed then and that's what I believe the case to be today."

He notes:

That stand compares favorably with Trump's pandering to the Kremlin and other autocratic regimes. It also looks good compared to some of the declarations of Mike Bloomberg, who has said China's Xi Jinping is "not a dictator" and compared Putin's seizure of the Crimea in Ukraine to the US annexation of California.

Diehl goes on to hail Sanders for his support for the US coup attempt against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his denunciation of Trump for partially withdrawing US troops from northern Syria last year. He adds, "Meanwhile, it's worth noting that Sanders does say that military force is sometimes necessary and that terrorism remains a threat."

Diehl's column comes less than two weeks after the *New York Times* published a survey of the foreign policy positions of the various Democratic presidential candidates. In that survey, the Sanders campaign told the *Times* that the senator, if president, would "consider military force to preempt an Iranian or North Korean nuclear or missile test." (See: "Sanders tells New York Times he would consider a preemptive strike against Iran or North Korea).

This reply not only implied acceptance of the illegal doctrine of preemptive war proclaimed by the administration of George W. Bush, it also raised the prospect of a Sanders administration initiating a war against Iran or nuclear-armed North Korea in response to an expected weapons *test*, not attack, threatening to draw in the major powers and trigger a nuclear holocaust.

The Sanders campaign also affirmed that the Vermont senator would consider using military force in a so-called "humanitarian intervention," that he would not begin to withdraw any of the more than 28,000 US troops from South Korea, would continue giving the current level of military aid to Israel and not move the US embassy from Jerusalem back to Tel Aviv, and would consider Russia an "adversary or even an enemy."

In response to a question on Trump's National Security Strategy, which declares that American military strategy is now oriented toward conflict with "great powers" and directly targets Russia and China, the Sanders campaign implicitly signaled its agreement and attacked Trump from the right. The reply stated that Trump has "refused to hold Russia accountable for its interference in our elections and human rights abuses, has done nothing to address our unfair trade agreement with China that only

benefits wealthy corporations, and has ignored China's mass internment of Uighurs and its brutal repression of protesters in Hong Kong."

The *Washington Post* has been unambiguously hostile to Sanders and has fully participated in the media gang-up against his candidacy. But in Monday's column, Diehl is essentially reassuring the ruling class that a Sanders administration would not mark a break from the aggressive and militarist policy of American imperialism.

Indeed, the record shows that the Vermont senator has backed the majority of American military aggressions, from the 1992-93 US intervention in Somalia, to the 1999 US-led NATO air war against Serbia, to the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, the US war against ISIS in Iraq and the US proxy war in Syria.

He also supported the US-backed and fascist-led coup that toppled the elected pro-Russian government in Ukraine in 2014 and installed a right-wing nationalist regime, which launched a civil war against pro-Russian separatists in the east of the country. That putsch was the signal for a massive buildup of US and NATO forces on Russia's western border, in preparation for an eventual war.

Those workers and youth who are attracted to Sanders because they are looking for a radical alternative to the social inequality, brutality and militarism they correctly identify with capitalism will soon learn that in Sanders they have a false prophet. His foreign policy is thoroughly imperialist and in line with the militaristic policy of the Democratic Party and the Obama White House.

Sanders' foreign policy says everything one needs to know about the domestic policy he would pursue as well. It is impossible to oppose the "billionaire class" at home when one supports its military operations abroad.



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