

Bernie Sanders: The left face of genocide

Barry Grey

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With the death toll in Gaza exceeding 15,000 and the horror of Israel's war of annihilation made even more clear by on-the-spot reports during the temporary lull in the bombing, and worldwide protests against the genocide continuing unabated, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders is seeking to present himself as an even-handed advocate for both the Israeli state and the Palestinians.

One would expect nothing less from this pro-Zionist, pro-imperialist political imposter. On November 22, he published an op-ed in the *New York Times* headlined "Justice for the Palestinians and Security for Israel."

It is worth discussing this piece of political sophistry in some detail, but it must first be placed in its proper context.

On Sunday, November 5, Sanders appeared on CNN to oppose mounting calls for a ceasefire in the Israeli slaughter. Parrotting the line of the Netanyahu government as well as the Biden administration, Sanders cast Israel's campaign of ethnic cleansing as a necessary act of self-defense following the armed breakout and incursion into southern Israel carried out by Hamas on October 7.

"I don't know how you can have a ceasefire, a permanent ceasefire, with an organization like Hamas, which is dedicated to turmoil and chaos and destroying the State of Israel," he told "State of the Union" moderator Dana Bash. "I think what the Arab countries in the region understand is that Hamas has got to go."

This defense of the Israeli onslaught was welcomed by the war criminals and their accomplices. White House Deputy Communications Director Herbie Ziskind tweeted out quotes from Sanders' interview. Within an hour of Sanders' appearance, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) posted a clip of his remarks on X/Twitter. In a subsequent tweet, the Zionist lobby said, "Thank you @SenSanders for your clear and principled opposition to calls for a ceasefire with Hamas."

Sanders' comments were praised by Israeli officials, and Israeli government spokesman Eylon Levy shared a clip of the interview on X/Twitter.

When Sanders made his public denunciation of calls to halt Israel's mass bombing, the official death toll in Gaza had already reached 9,770, with children and women comprising a majority of the victims. Israel was systematically targeting hospitals, schools, UN facilities and other buildings where Palestinians whose homes had been destroyed sought refuge. This included the October 17 bombing of Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City, which, according to Gazan officials, killed at least 471 people and wounded more than 300 others.

By the time of Sanders' *New York Times* op-ed, which appeared two days before the current bombing pause and hostage exchange took effect, the official death toll was over 14,500, not counting some 7,000 Gazans listed as "missing" and presumed to be buried under the rubble. This arguably makes Sanders complicit in a personal way in the deaths of at least 4,730 Palestinians.

Sanders continues to reject a permanent ceasefire in his November 22 op-ed. Instead, he hails the temporary pause and calls for it to be expanded into an "extended humanitarian pause so that badly needed aid ... can get into Gaza and save lives." Other words besides "ceasefire" that are absent

from his article include "genocide," "war crime," "ethnic cleansing" and "Biden."

Indeed, his entire presentation of the US-backed Israeli slaughter is designed to obscure its unprecedented scope and genocidal character. Sanders begins by presenting the current war as the fifth "in the last 15 years between Israel and Hamas," i.e., just the latest in a string of recurring conflicts. He then presents a potted version of the past 75 years of Zionist dispossession and colonialist oppression of the Palestinian masses in a manner that whitewashes the role of both Zionism and US imperialism. He writes:

For 75 years, diplomats, well-intentioned Israelis and Palestinians and government leaders around the world have struggled to bring peace to this region.

What has blocked an enlightened solution that would bring peace and stability to the region and reconcile the Palestinians to their inferior lot, according to Sanders' narrative, is the evil intervention of "extremists." In this fantasy world, there are no economic, geopolitical or class interests at work. The Zionist ruling elite and the American ruling class have no vested interest in subjugating the Palestinians in order to maintain the existing setup in the Middle East, with Israel serving as Washington and Wall Street's militarized outpost.

Sanders continues:

For those of us who want not only to bring this war to an end, but to avoid a future one, we must first be clear-eyed about facts.

What follows is a completely biased and distorted, pro-Israeli presentation of the "facts." Sanders begins by uncritically rehashing the official Israeli version of the events of October 7. He writes:

On Oct. 7, Hamas, a terrorist organization, unleashed a barbaric attack against Israel, killing about 1,200 innocent men, women and children and taking more than 200 hostage.

Here Sanders ignores reporting, mainly from within Israel, that demolishes the official narrative of the Hamas attack, strongly indicating that (1) the Israeli government and military had advance knowledge of an imminent and major attack across the blockaded border with Gaza into southern Israel; and (2) many, if not most, of the Israelis killed in the October 7 attack were killed by Israel Defense Forces troops and tanks, which used massive fire-power to retake control of areas seized by Hamas in the aftermath of the initial attack.

Even more dishonest is the total omission of the historical background

to the October 7 incursion, and its use by Israel as the pretext for activating long-prepared plans to forcibly remove the Palestinian population from Gaza, as part of the scheme to annex Gaza and the West Bank. Nothing is said of the 1948 *Nakba* that drove more than 700,000 Palestinians from their villages and farms, the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank in 1967, and the system of apartheid and oppression that has existed ever since.

Sanders presents Hamas as nothing more than a criminal terrorist organization, ignoring the fact that it won a popular election in 2006 to oust the discredited and corrupt Palestinian Authority from power in Gaza. He quotes a Hamas spokesman as saying, “I hope that the state of war with Israel will become permanent on all the borders, and that the Arab world will stand with us,” in order to support the Israeli line that Hamas must be eliminated. But he says nothing about statements by Israeli officials expressing genocidal intent.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for example, in a recent press conference likened the Palestinians to a tribe known as Amalek that is referenced in the Hebrew Bible. The biblical passage instructs the Israelites to exterminate every man, woman and child, and even the livestock, of the Amalekites.

National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir called for the elimination of anyone supporting or sympathizing with Hamas.

In the end, Sanders offers a list of proposals similar in substance to the public positions of President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken. They do not include a permanent halt to Israeli bombing, the immediate withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Gaza, or the removal of the Netanyahu government.

Sanders calls for an end to “indiscriminate” bombing, i.e., the continuation of “discriminate” bombing. He opposes a “long-term” Israeli re-occupation and blockade of the enclave, suggesting he is OK with a “short-term” one—whatever that means.

Alongside increased humanitarian aid, he calls on Israel to guarantee the right of displaced Gazans to return to their homes (omitting the fact that their homes have likely been destroyed), to put an end to settler violence in the West Bank, and to freeze settlement expansion—none of which Israel will accept. And even if it did, the basic framework of Palestinian oppression and US imperialist domination exerted via Israel would remain intact.

This, according to Sanders’ wish list, is to lead to “broad peace talks for a two-state solution.” As Sanders makes clear, all of this is predicated on removing Hamas from power. Thus, under the guise of securing “justice” for the Palestinians, US imperialism is to impose a new government more to its liking in Gaza.

That government is to be run by the Palestinian Authority, voted out by the Gazans in 2006 and still headed by 88-year-old Mahmoud Abbas. Sanders writes:

Those steps will show that peace can deliver for the Palestinian people, hopefully giving the Palestinian Authority the legitimacy it needs to assume administrative control of Gaza, likely after an interim stabilization period under an international force.

The sheer cynicism and imperialist arrogance of this project is underscored by recent commentaries in the Western press. On November 25, Steven Erlanger, the chief diplomatic correspondent for the *New York Times*, wrote:

The [Palestinian] authority is deeply unpopular even where it has control in the West Bank, because it is seen as a subcontractor to

the long Israeli occupation. Its support is so tenuous, in fact, that it would be unlikely to survive without the security provided by the Israeli Army...

In the view of many of the people it is supposed to represent, the authority has devolved into an authoritarian, corrupt and undemocratic administration that sits on an iron throne built by Israel ... if elections were held today, it is probable, experts and polls suggest, that Hamas would win again.

On November 27, the *Guardian* seconded this assessment, writing:

Western diplomats have turned to the previously neglected Palestinian Authority to fill the political vacuum likely to be created by the planned destruction of Hamas in Gaza, but know their chosen rescue vehicle is unpopular, deemed corrupt, and badly in need of a new generation of leaders that no one has yet been able to identify. ...

Respected opinion polling by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research shows that days before the Hamas assault on Israel, 80 percent of Palestinians considered the PA corrupt, and 62 percent viewed it as a liability rather than an asset. None of its main institutions enjoys popular legitimacy.

The PA’s main function in the West Bank is to serve as Israel’s police force on the ground, rounding up and detaining Palestinian opponents of Zionist oppression. The *Guardian* writes:

As a result, the PA ended up being viewed by Palestinians increasingly as a security sub-contractor for Israel, and in the name of fighting terrorism often imposed arbitrary justice in the West Bank. Lawyers for Justice, a group that documents just such arbitrary justice cases, estimated that in 2022 alone the PA arrested more than 500 Palestinians for anti-Israel offences.

Thus, the much vaunted “two-state” solution promoted by Sanders, in the unlikely event of its ever materializing, would boil down to a police state ruled by Palestinian bourgeois puppets of US imperialism and Israel. So much for the “progressive” and “democratic” pretensions of Bernie Sanders, the “left” voice of imperialist genocide.



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