

Amid crocodile tears for Gaza

Bernie Sanders backs US attack on Yemen

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17 January 2024

On Sunday, the 100th day of the US/Israeli war on Gaza, Bernie Sanders appeared on CNN's "State of the Union" program and declared his support for attacks by the United States and Britain on Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen. The ongoing attacks, which began on January 11, mark a major escalation of the US-led war in the Middle East and prefigure a direct attack by Washington on Iran.

From the beginning of the Israeli onslaught against Gaza, Sanders has promoted the propaganda line of Tel Aviv and Washington that Israel's campaign of mass murder and destruction targeting defenseless civilians, mainly women and children, is a defensive response to the armed incursion of Hamas last October 7. While criticizing Israel's "disproportionate" tactics, he has supported the goal of extirpating the Hamas "terrorists."

He is now providing the same service for the war criminals in Washington in relation to Yemen. Just as he ignores the previous history of Zionist displacement, terrorist violence and occupation against the Palestinians—including the 17-year blockade and siege of Gaza, interspersed with deadly attacks by the Israel Defense Forces—in casting Hamas as the aggressor, he ignores the genocidal war against the Houthis carried out by Saudi Arabia with the support of the US. According to the United Nations, 377,000 people have been killed in the war against the impoverished Houthis, which has employed blockades to inflict mass starvation and disease.

On Sunday, CNN moderator Jake Tapper began his interview with the "progressive" senator from Vermont by raising President Biden's "dramatic escalation in the Middle East" and noting:

A top House progressive, [Pramila] Jayapal, said the president should have gotten, and in fact needed, permission from Congress, calling the strikes an unacceptable violation of the Constitution. Do you agree with her? Were these strikes illegal?

Sanders brushed aside the unilateral and illegal character of Biden's action, saying:

What I do think, the president has the right to respond on an emergency basis to the disruption of international shipping brought about by the Houthis. On the other hand, he's got to get to Congress immediately. Congress has a right to declare war, not the president of the United States. So I hope this issue gets to Congress immediately.

Of course, as Sanders well knows, Biden has no intention of seeking congressional authorization for the already escalating war on Yemen, nor has the Vermont senator publicly pursued the matter since the CNN interview.

In reality, Sanders was brought onto Sunday's program to perform a political function for the Biden administration and the US war machine. His role is to provide a "left" imprimatur to the latest escalation, under conditions of mass popular opposition to the Israeli genocide and Washington's central role in arming and overseeing it, as well as the expansion of the war throughout the Middle East. Sunday's program followed the previous day's mass anti-genocide protests around the world, including marches of 300,000 in London and 100,000 in Washington D.C.

There is a pattern to such appearances by the pro-Zionist "progressive." Sanders was interviewed by the other host of "State of the Union," Dana Bash, on November 5 of last year. This was at a point of rapidly mounting international protests against the war in Gaza under conditions of the daily carpet-bombing of Palestinian apartment blocks, refugee camps, hospitals, mosques, churches and UN facilities, as well as a blockade of fuel, food and medical supplies. That Saturday had seen large protests in cities around the world, including marches involving 300,000 people in both London and Washington D.C. The main demand was for a ceasefire to halt the killing.

Asked if he supported a ceasefire, Sanders replied:

I don't see 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. I think what the Arab countries in the region understand is that Hamas has got to go.

For all his "humanitarian" posturing since then, Sanders has continued to oppose a ceasefire, in line with the policy of both the fascist Netanyahu and "Genocide Joe" Biden.

In last Sunday's interview, Tapper raised a resolution Sanders was bringing to the floor of the Senate that would require the State Department to submit a report on whether Israel was violating international human rights laws and conventions in its war on Gaza, under a provision of the Foreign Assistance Act that prohibits US military aid to such governments. Tapper quoted a statement by the White House National Security Council spokesman opposing the measure.

In the carefully staged exchange between Tapper and Sanders, this

was the cue for Sanders to shed crocodile tears about the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza and prop up the illusion that moral pressure can convince Congress and Biden to rein in the Israeli killing machine, even as it continues to prosecute its “defensive” war.

Sanders noted the indices of mass death, displacement, starvation and disease, taking their greatest toll on children, since Israel launched its assault—with weapons supplied by the US—on the tiny, densely populated enclave of Gaza.

At one point Tapper asked:

How can the Israelis go after Hamas if they are hiding among the Palestinian civilians?

Sanders replied:

Jake, that is a very fair question. As I have said a million times, Hamas is a disgusting terrorist organization ... This is not an easy task, to go after Hamas ... But you don't destroy an entire people in the process.

Asked what the Israelis should be doing, Sanders reiterated his call for a “humanitarian pause” (not a ceasefire) to allow in food and water and avert famine. Beyond that, Israel had to “target its attacks.”

In the interview, as in many previous statements, Sanders called the situation in Gaza a “humanitarian catastrophe.” This term, by design, skirts the issue of intentionality. He avoided far more accurate designations such as “genocide,” “war crime” and “ethnic cleansing.” He made no mention of South Africa’s meticulously documented and unanswerable indictment of Israel for genocide that had been presented at a hearing of the United Nations’ International Court of Justice just days before, or the Biden administration’s cynical and absurd dismissal of it as “meritless.”

As for his much vaunted resolution on US aid to Israel—introduced under conditions where Biden has invoked emergency powers to unilaterally expedite arms shipments to Israel—Sanders acknowledged that it had no chance of being passed by the Democratic-controlled Senate. Asked by Tapper if he thought the bill could get the 51 votes required for passage when it came to the floor on Tuesday, Sanders replied, “I don't ... It's going to be a long, hard process.”

How his bill could be anything other than a cynical diversion, the “human rights” supporter of US imperialism did not say. In the event, the bill received only 11 votes on Tuesday and was summarily quashed.

The sophistry that underlies all of Sanders’ human rights pretensions was perhaps most glaringly exposed in his parroting of the official line that the Biden administration is working to rein in the Netanyahu regime’s assault on defenseless civilians in Gaza. This is a corollary of the lie that the US is not directly involved in and responsible for the war of annihilation that will soon enter its fourth month.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, the opposite is the case. The fascist Netanyahu government could not continue the war for a day without the full military, economic and political support of Washington. This extends to providing direct logistical and targeting assistance for the Israel Defense Forces’ daily war crimes in the

enclave. The genocide in Gaza—supported by all of the imperialist powers—is an integral part of US imperialism’s strategy of global war in pursuit of world hegemony. It is one front in an emerging world war, along with Washington’s proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, its escalating war throughout the Middle East, whose central target is Iran, and its war preparations against China.

There is nothing subtle about Sanders’ efforts to perform damage control for Biden and the Democratic Party. The basic purpose of the interview was revealed toward its conclusion, when Tapper asked whether “young progressives in the United States will ultimately rally behind Joe Biden in November, or has he seriously damaged his standing?”

Sanders replied:

The choice is pretty clear, running against Donald Trump ... I think people will end up rallying behind Biden.

This was followed by an absurd and patently false exoneration of Biden for the genocide in Gaza:

He has been very clear. He has expressed his concern about “indiscriminate bombing.” He has asked Netanyahu over and over again to change course. ... You cannot give billions and billions of dollars to a country that ignores your wishes, violates international law.

The WSWS has dubbed Sanders—and his past and present promoters in the pseudo-left, such as the Democratic Socialists of America—as “the left face of genocide.” His comments Sunday only add further proof of the truth of this designation.



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