

As Democrats back war drive against Iran, Sanders seeks to contain mass anti-war sentiment on “Fighting Oligarchy” tour

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The unprovoked and illegal bombing of Iranian nuclear facilities by US B-2 bombers on Saturday has already sparked widespread opposition within the American and international working class.

On Sunday, over a dozen anti-war protests drawing thousands of people were held across the United States, including in New York City, Washington D.C. and San Francisco. These demonstrations come just one week after millions participated in the nationwide “No Kings” protests, held in opposition to Trump’s assault on democratic rights and his drive to establish a presidential dictatorship.

Leaders of the Republican Party have largely marched in lockstep with Trump and the illegal assault on Iran, with both House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Majority Leader John Thune issuing statements of support. Prominent Democrats have also backed the war, including Pennsylvania Senator John Fetterman, who released his own statement endorsing the attack.

Writing on X after the bombings, Fetterman declared, “This was the correct move by @POTUS.” Fetterman—who was endorsed and promoted by *Jacobin* magazine and the Democratic Socialists of America during his 2022 Senate campaign—added, “Iran is the world’s leading sponsor of terrorism and cannot have nuclear capabilities... I’m grateful for and salute the finest military in the world.”

The Democrats have refused to call for any mass action in response to Trump’s war crimes. Instead, Representatives Ro Khanna (D-California) and Thomas Massie (R-Kentucky), along with Senators Tim Kaine (D-Virginia) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont), have introduced war powers resolutions that nominally seek to reassert congressional authority over the launching of offensive wars.

None of the resolutions currently enjoy majority support within either party, and none were endorsed by party leadership prior to Saturday’s strikes. Notably, all of the proposals—including Sanders’s “No War Against Iran Act”—leave intact Trump’s authority to order so-called “defensive” strikes if US forces are attacked.

Speaking to CNN’s Erin Burnett on Sunday, Khanna—one of the sponsors of the war powers resolution—made clear that he supports Trump’s plans to deploy thousands more troops and additional military hardware to the region. “I support the president now in terms of deploying to do everything we can to keep our troops

safe,” Khanna said.

Later in the interview, Khanna explicitly denied that Iran had any right to self-defense. “We need to make it clear to Iran that the worst thing they can do is to hit any American asset or American troop,” he said. “They will have unanimous condemnation by Congress if they dare to take that step...”

Now that the United States has bombed Iran using B-2 stealth bombers and Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) bunker-busting bombs—among the most aggressive escalations imaginable—the toothless character of the Kaine, Sanders and Massie resolutions stands fully exposed. Far from restraining US militarism, these measures serve as post-hoc political cover for war. Their built-in “self-defense” loophole provides a pretext for strikes that are in violation of international law and thoroughly criminal.

While Iran retains the right to self-defense under international law, these resolutions recognize that right only for the United States. They make no allowance for other nations to defend themselves against US or allied aggression. In doing so, the resolutions reinforce the doctrine of imperialist impunity: Washington and its proxies may bomb, invade and assassinate with full legal and political backing, while any act of resistance is condemned as terrorism or escalation.

New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has called for impeaching Trump over his unconstitutional actions. On June 21, she tweeted, “The President’s disastrous decision to bomb Iran without authorization is a grave violation of the Constitution and Congressional War Powers... It is absolutely and clearly grounds for impeachment.”

This call is nothing more than a political stunt, whose purpose is to preserve what little remains of Ocasio-Cortez’s credibility and prevent anti-war sentiment from breaking out of the confines of the Democratic Party. In any event, she knows full well that her call will have no political impact on Democratic Party policies, let alone the war policies of the Trump administration.

On Friday, the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) reported that at least 263 civilians have been killed in Iran since Israel began launching strikes with American-made weapons on June 13.

The dictatorial character of the current administration was expressed in the bombings themselves. Trump did not seek authorization from Congress, as required by the War Powers

Resolution of 1973, nor did he inform leading members of both parties. According to multiple reports, Trump briefed House Speaker Mike Johnson, Senate Republican Leader John Thune and Representative Rick Crawford, the Republican chair of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, before the attack—but not their Democratic counterparts.

Among those informed only after the bombings had already begun was Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. The nominal independent was speaking at a “Fighting Oligarchy” event in Tulsa, Oklahoma on Saturday when he was notified mid-speech of the strikes.

Sanders briefly read Trump’s tweet announcing the bombing before the multi-thousand-strong crowd in Tulsa erupted into boos, which soon gave way to sustained chants of “No more war!”

Sanders, clearly taken aback by the crowd’s chanting, improvised his response and called the news “alarming” and “grossly unconstitutional.” He told the crowd, “All of you know that the only entity that can take this country to war is the US Congress. The president does not have the right.”

Sanders quickly returned to his campaign-style speech, but during Sunday’s “Fighting Oligarchy” event in Fort Worth, Texas, he expanded on his criticism of the war.

He framed his opposition to war with Iran within the context of the ongoing genocide in Gaza. While he continues to avoid explicitly labeling the mass murder, starvation, and ethnic cleansing in Gaza as genocide—even after more than 20 months of slaughter—he stated, “In my view what the Netanyahu government in Israel is doing is absolutely horrific. Right now, right now, what they are doing is literally starving Palestinian children in Gaza.”

Sanders noted that he had introduced two resolutions in Congress aimed at blocking US funding for the war in Gaza, but admitted he was only able to secure “15 votes” for one and “16 votes on another.”

“Now why is that?” Sanders asked. “Do you think it’s because members of the Senate feel good about children in Gaza starving to death?”

Before the crowd could respond, Sanders quickly added, “They’re not.” Offering political cover for his Democratic colleagues, Sanders claimed the real reason a majority did not support his resolutions was fear of political retaliation: “The next day, Democratic Super PACs like AIPAC say, ‘You are out of here.’”

Apparently, the threat of losing a steady paycheck is enough for the average capitalist politician of whatever party to abandon any pretense of opposition to genocide.

Within this context, Sanders declared it was time to “go on the offense” and present an “alternative vision.”

“At the top of that agenda, at this moment, is to say no to the Netanyahu–Trump war in Iran,” Sanders bellowed. He went on to declare that the essential task was to reverse the Citizens’ United Supreme Court decision that reversed campaign finance restrictions and enabled corporations and other outside groups to spend unlimited money on elections.

Sanders reminded the crowd that the US government has routinely lied to justify its wars, from Vietnam to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Recalling the latter, he said, “Among those back

in 2002 who told us we had to go to war in Iraq was none other than Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel.”

Sanders’ call for opposition to the war against Iran was well received by the crowd. But, as in every Sanders event, the senator failed to propose any concrete action to stop the war. Instead, he offered empty pablum: “Let’s not let them divide us up. Let’s stand together, let’s take them on, let’s transform this country.”

Decades of unending bipartisan support for imperialist war have produced a deep reservoir of opposition within the American working class. In polls conducted ahead of the bombing of Iran, strong majorities opposed US military involvement in the conflict between Iran and Israel. A YouGov poll conducted June 13–16 found that 60 percent of US adults opposed military intervention, including 53 percent of Republicans. A *Washington Post* poll published June 18 found that only 25 percent supported US airstrikes against Iran over its nuclear program.

Sanders’ empty calls to oppose the war are an effort to stay ahead of public opinion and channel mass anti-war sentiment back into the Democratic Party. Like the Republicans, the Democrats have long used Israel as a beachhead for launching US military campaigns across the Middle East.

By framing the war as solely the product of Trump and Netanyahu, Sanders is attempting to whitewash the fact that this war enjoys bipartisan support and has been planned in advance by US imperialism for decades.

Sanders seeks to shield the capitalist system and the US government as a whole, all while burnishing his “anti-war credentials”—badly tarnished after 20 months of unwavering support for “Genocide Joe” Biden and Kamala “Holocaust” Harris, and his refusal to acknowledge the genocide in Gaza as such.

Sanders’ hollow calls to oppose the invasion of Iran, like his toothless “No War Against Iran Act,” are not serious efforts to halt imperialist war. They are political maneuvers designed to trap workers and youth searching for a way to end war back within the dead-end of the Democratic Party and the capitalist system it defends.

The only way to stop the war against Iran, end the genocide in Gaza and break the stranglehold of the financial oligarchy, is through the independent mobilization of the working class—against all capitalist parties, their governments and their political representatives.



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