

Bernie Sanders Gets a Foreign Policy

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Region: [USA](#)

Global Research, September 27, 2015

[Let's Try Democracy](#) 27 September 2015

After [25,000 people](#) asked, Senator Bernie Sanders [added a few words](#) to his presidential campaign website about the 96% of humanity he'd been ignoring.

He did not, as his spoken comments heretofore might have suggested, make this statement entirely or at all about fraud and waste in the military. He did not even mention Saudi Arabia, much less declare that it should "take the lead" or "get its hands dirty" as he had been doing in interviews, even as Saudi Arabia bombs Yemeni families with U.S. cluster bombs. While he mentioned veterans and called them brave, he also did not turn the focus of his statement toward glorification of troops, as he very well might have.

All that to the good, the statement does lack some key ingredients. Should the United States be spending a trillion dollars a year and over half of discretionary spending on militarism? Should it cut that by 50%, increase it by 30%, trim it by 3%? We really can't tell from this statement insisting on the need for major military spending while admitting the harm it does:

And while there is no question our military must be fully prepared and have the resources it needs to fight international terrorism, it is imperative that we take a hard look at the Pentagon's budget and the priorities it has established. The U.S. military must be equipped to fight today's battles, not those of the last war, much less the Cold War. Our defense budget must represent our national security interests and the needs of our military, not the reelection of members of Congress or the profits of defense contractors. The warning that President Dwight David Eisenhower gave us about the influence of the Military-Industrial Complex in 1961 is truer today than it was then.

That warning, of course, might be interpreted by some as suggesting that investing in preparation for "today's battles" is what produces today's battles.

And which of today's battles would Sanders like to end? Drones are not mentioned. Special forces are not mentioned. Foreign bases are not mentioned. The only hint he gives about future action in Iraq or Syria suggests that he would continue to use the military to make things worse while simultaneously trying other approaches to make things better:

We live in a dangerous world full of serious threats, perhaps none more so than the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaeda. Senator Sanders is committed to keeping America safe, and pursuing those who would do Americans harm. But we cannot combat international terrorism alone. We must work with our allies to root out terrorist funding networks, provide logistical support in the region, disrupt online radicalization, provide humanitarian relief, and support and defend religious freedom. Moreover, we must begin to

address the root causes of radicalization, instead of focusing solely on military responses to those who have already become radicalized.

Would he end the U.S. war on Afghanistan?

Sen. Sanders called on both Presidents Bush and Obama to withdraw U.S. troops as soon as possible and for the people of Afghanistan to take full responsibility for their own security. After visiting Afghanistan, Sen. Sanders spoke-out against the rampant corruption he saw, particularly in regards to elections, security and the banking system.

From that, an American suffering under the delusion that the war had already been ended would be enlightened not at all, and one really can't tell whether Sanders would choose to take any sort of action to end it in reality. Of course, he is a U.S. Senator and is not attempting to cut off the funding.

Sanders' statement is a very mixed bag. He supports the Iran agreement while pushing false claims about "Iran developing nuclear weapons." He criticizes "both sides" in Palestine, but says not one word about cutting off free weaponry or international legal protection for Israel — or for any other governments. The Pope's call to end the arms trade, which the United States leads, goes unmentioned. He mentions nuclear weapons, but only the nonexistent ones belonging to Iran, not those of the United States or Israel or any other nation. Disarmament is not an agenda item here. And how could it be when he declares, in violation of the U.N. Charter, in his first paragraph that "force must always be an option"?

Sanders offers no details on a shift away from serving as weapons supplier to the world, to serious investment in aid and diplomacy. But he does say this:

However, after nearly fourteen years of ill-conceived and disastrous military engagements in the Middle East, it is time for a new approach. We must move away from policies that favor unilateral military action and preemptive war, and that make the United States the de facto policeman of the world. Senator Sanders believes that foreign policy is not just deciding how to react to conflict around the world, but also includes redefining America's role in the increasingly global economy. Along with our allies throughout the world, we should be vigorous in attempting to prevent international conflict, not just responding to problems. For example, the international trade agreements we enter into, and our energy and climate change policies not only have enormous consequences for Americans here at home, but greatly affect our relations with countries around the world. Senator Sanders has the experience, the record and the vision not just to lead on these critically important issues, but to take our country in a very different direction.

Sanders claims, however, absurdly, that he has only supported wars that were a "last resort." He includes among those, Afghanistan and Yugoslavia, despite neither having been remotely a last resort. Sanders admits as much, saying, "I supported the use of force to stop the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans." Set aside the fact that it increased the ethnic cleansing and that diplomacy was not really attempted, what he is claiming is a philanthropic mission, not a "last resort." Sanders also says, "And, in the wake of the attacks on September 11, 2001, I supported the use of force in Afghanistan to hunt down the terrorists who attacked us." Set aside the Taliban's offer to transfer Osama bin Laden to a third country to be tried,

what Sanders is describing is hunting and murdering people in a distant land, not a “last resort” — and also not what he voted for, and Rep. Barbara Lee voted against, which was a blank check for endless war at presidential discretion.

All of this obviously leaves open the possibility of endless global war but suggests a desire not to eagerly seek it out. Also obviously it is far better than Hillary Clinton would [say](#), less than Jill Stein would [say](#) (“Establish a foreign policy based on diplomacy, international law, and human rights. End the wars and drone attacks, cut military spending by at least 50% and close the 700+ foreign military bases that are turning our republic into a bankrupt empire.

Stop U.S. support and arms sales to human rights abusers, and lead on global nuclear disarmament.”), and a bit different from what Lincoln Chafee would say (the latter actually [admits](#) the U.S. wars created ISIS and are making us less safe, says he’d end drone strikes, etc.). And of course the whole lot of them are a distraction from the struggle to reduce and end militarism and prevent wars in 2015, a year with no election in it. Still, it’s encouraging that a leading “socialist” candidate for U.S. president finally has a foreign policy, even if it hardly resembles Jeremy Corbyn’s.

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