

Bernie Sanders and the Military Industrial Complex.

Bernie 2.0

By [Ann Garrison](#)

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Theme: [History](#)

No one on the left was more critical of Bernie Sanders during his 2016 presidential run than late Black Agenda Report Editor Bruce Dixon. However, after Bernie's speech announcing that he planned to run again this year, Bruce asked me, "Did you see that?" I said, "No, not yet." Then he said, "This is a whole new Bernie. Bernie 2.0. This is a Bernie who's learned how to talk to Black people."

I of course said, "But you don't think he could defeat the DNC apparatus, do you?" He said, "I don't know," and no one was more astute about electoral politics than Bruce Dixon, who could count campaigns that defeated the Daley machine in Chicago among his accomplishments.

Other weekly Black Agenda writers have predicted that the DNC will manage to steal the nomination out from under Sanders again and that the youthful army of volunteers behind him may then finally leave the Democratic Party. Or that the right-wing Democrats who have been ascendant since Bill Clinton's 1992 victory will leave instead.

That's still quite possible, but after Bernie's stunning victory in multicultural, Nevada, where white people are a 47% minority, it no longer seems out of the question that he will win the 51% of pledged delegates required to clinch the nomination. Or that he will head into the Democratic Convention with so many more delegates than any other candidate that it will be awkward for the superdelegates to deny him the nomination on the second round.

How many more meltdowns like the Iowa Caucuses can the DNC stage and survive? There's a limit to how many ghost votes can be cast and how many more suppressed without obvious fraud, so electronic voting fraud seems most likely to be deployed to defeat him. We do have to consider that Republicans will be every bit as determined to stop Bernie as corporate Democrats, and that Republicans own most, if not all, the electronic voting machinery. They resist examining its workings by claiming that it's their private property, so they might as well padlock Congress, the White House, and the Supreme Court unless Americans finally stop putting up with them.

Many claim that the delegate-rich California primary was stolen from Bernie in 2016. Psychologists Rodolfo Cortes Barragan and Axel Geijssel studied [results](#) nationwide and concluded that Bernie won 51% of the vote in states with paper ballots but only 35% in states with electronic ballots.

However, this time around, Bernie seems to have a team prepared to stay behind to challenge results in states where they seem anomalous. In 2016 the Iowa results seemed tainted by coin tosses disproportionately favoring Hillary Clinton, but Bernie moved on to

the next primary, as all candidates must.

Bernie and the Bombs

All that was to explain why I might even talk about the possibility of a President Bernie and whether he and his political base could stand up to the military industrial complex. I say “Bernie and his political base” because we all know that’s the measure of what he could accomplish. If his army of volunteers pack up and go home instead of staying organized, he won’t be able to accomplish the goals he declares in his stump speech.

In that stump speech, Bernie says over and over, “We are putting the prison industrial complex on notice! We are putting the military industrial complex on notice!”

I can’t think of a viable candidate saying anything so bold since George McGovern promised to end the Vietnam War, and he was of course clobbered by Richard Nixon.

Corporate Democrats claim to fear a repeat of his defeat in 1972, but idealistic, anti-war (and draft eligible) students led McGovern’s campaign. Sanders’s base is among people who are suffering here at home, not overseas—people suffering because of ICE raids, home foreclosures, medical debt, college debt, child care costs, stagnant or declining wages, and environmental injustice like the water in Flint, the pipelines surrounding Plains Indians, and the sea levels threatening coastal populations in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Florida. That’s a much broader political base, especially after so many decades of austerity and war. Bernie’s fiery claims that we’re going to put the prison industrial complex and the military industrial complex on notice are met with huge applause from the huge crowds who pack into his rallies. They seem to understand not only the injustice of mass incarceration and perpetual war but also its cost to American infrastructure and their own lives.

Bernie has consistently voted against the war budget, also known by the misnomer “National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).” It’s difficult to assert that his commitment to redirecting military and industrial dollars to human needs isn’t sincere.

However, if he keeps allowing himself to be pushed into defending himself against allegations that “the Russians” and Vladimir Putin are supporting his campaign, he will not be able to actualize his agenda even if elected. To institute Medicare4All, the Green New Deal, free public college, universal free child care, and all his other eminently reasonable programs, he will have to radically cut the grotesquely bloated US military budget.

A newly daunting challenge may be Trump’s request for a 49% increase in [Department of Energy funds to manufacture nuclear weapons](#). (That’s the main thing the Department of Energy does.) Would he be able to turn that back if the warmongering bipartisan Congress approved it before he took office?

If Bernie is elected, but the war machine has him boxed him into a corner about demon Russians and Vladimir Putin, his agenda will go the way of Lyndon Johnson’s [Great Society](#) domestic programs, which were drained by the cost of the Vietnam War.

If the war machine can’t stop him at the polls, they’ll certainly try to stop him in office. We’ll hear that we’re in grave danger from Russia, that Russia might turn off our heat in the winter, that Russia is moving troops to its own borders with NATO, and more. And that Bernie is trying to cut the military budget because he’s soft on Russia, because Russia

backed his campaign, because he honeymooned in Russia, because he's in Putin's pocket, etc. ad nauseum. The corporate media will lead the way with Rachel Maddow and Chris Matthews on the front lines. (The Democratic Party just sent me a survey that began: "Do you think Rachel Maddow would make a good vice president?" I answered no from the email address msnbcsucks@gmail.com.)

Just before the Nevada caucuses, the Washington Post suddenly reported that intelligence sources have determined that Russia is supporting Bernie's campaign as well as Trump's. They claimed that they had informed him weeks earlier, but that he'd kept it a secret. Of course I know that Bernie has succumbed to the Russian election interference propaganda since 2016, but I still felt like I'd been kicked in the head when he responded that Vladimir Putin's a thug and he'd keep Russia out of our elections just as he seemed to be heading into a big win in Nevada.

I had re-registered to vote for Bernie in the California primary, planning to re-register Green before the general election (in which Californians have already decided that any blue will boogaloo). I briefly considered re-re-registering but it was past the deadline for any sort of registering without crossing Berkeley and Oakland to get to the Alameda County Department of Elections, so I'm still in.

Some people asked me, "Why are you bringing this up now, when everyone's still feeling so good, just two days after Nevada?"

On Facebook, a friend responded, "You can support Bernie Sanders and, like the members of Pussy Riot, believe that Putin is a thug. What's wrong with that comment?" I replied, "Escalating tensions on NATO's border with Russia, cancellation of arms treaties, particularly nuclear arms treaties, that sort of thing. Calling Putin a thug doesn't augur well for diplomacy and de-escalation."

Another Facebook friend responded, "I am kind of amazed at what you write here. You are doing just what the Demons want you to do. Scare people with Negativity."

I replied, "I was glad Bernie won so big in Nevada. It demonstrates that there is some humanity left in this most violent of nations. And I know that at this point inside a campaign it's all about winning, but we have to talk about it because the spook state will push Bernie harder and harder about Russia as the July Democratic convention, and perhaps even the November election, draw nigh. The New York Times, Washington Post, etc., will be talking about it plenty, and if Bernie's base isn't asking him to face them down and say that we have real problems to deal with here, he's likely to become more and more defensive instead."

Another friend of mine responded, "Yes, the war was draining the flood of justice that followed the riots and so many citizens burning their own cities (during the 1960s). Yes, the Russian 'threat' is a hoax for the same ends. What are the limits of 'thought,' within the propaganda system? Could Bernie speak the truth and be electable?"

Maybe so, maybe not, but for now it looks like he won't unless, perhaps, his army of volunteers and supporters demand it. If they don't, then his election—should it actually happen—is likely to be a hollow victory.

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Ann Garrison is an independent journalist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. In 2014, she received the Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza Democracy and Peace Prize for her reporting on conflict in the African Great Lakes region. She can be reached at ann@kpfa.org. She is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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