

Do the Democrats Offer a Progressive Choice for US President? “Bernie Sanders’ Foreign Policy Resembles that of the Hawks”

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Although the 2016 presidential election is a year away, the media is abuzz with the candidates – the Republican and Democratic candidates, that is. When CBS’s Stephen Colbert posed comedically with a collage of the 18 or so declared hopefuls, the Green Party’s candidate, Dr. Jill Stein, was noticeably absent from his photo. Only outlets like Democracy Now!, PBS and RT News feature the good doctor.

What choices do progressives have?

Hillary Clinton leaves a lot to be desired. She does favor a woman’s right to choose and has recently come out in support of marriage equality. Clinton supports comprehensive immigration reform but also backs stepped-up border enforcement. A former member of the board of Walmart, she is cozy with Wall Street and voted for the Patriot Act. Clinton has been called a “focus group Democrat,” often accused of believing what polls and focus groups tell her she should believe.



Dr. Jill Stein speaking at the Global Climate Convergence March in Madison, Wisconsin, in April, 2014.

(Photo: Light Brigading / Flickr)

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On foreign policy issues, Clinton is a first-class hawk. As Robert Scheer [wrote](#) on Truthdig: “Clinton, in rhetoric and action, will never allow a Republican opponent to appear more hawkish than herself. In the general election, she will burnish her record of support for every bit of military folly from George W. [Bush]’s invasion of Iraq to her own engineering of the campaign to overthrow all secular dictators in the Middle East who have proved to be an inconvenience to the Saudi theocracy.”

“During her tenure in the Obama administration,” Scheer added, “Clinton, by her own frequent boastful admission, was the hawk in the Cabinet pressuring the president to be even more aggressive in his drone assassinations and murderous air wars, which have destabilized the region and created what the pope recently termed the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War.”

Joe Biden is contemplating whether to enter the race. He is more likable and more trusted than Clinton. But his positions on the issues are very similar to hers.

Meanwhile, Democratic Party candidate Bernie Sanders appears to be giving Clinton a run for her corporate money, so progressives may have a viable alternative to Clinton. But although Sanders' positions on economic inequality, jobs, education, climate change, immigration, marriage equality, women's right to choose, health care and surveillance (he voted against the Patriot Act) give us hope for serious change, Sanders' foreign policy strongly resembles that of the hawks in both major parties.

Domestic and foreign policy are inextricably linked. George W. Bush's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan cost US taxpayers upward of \$4 trillion, and the price of Barack Obama's drone wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, Libya and Yemen continues to rise.

And Obama sends Israel \$8 million a day, money it uses to fund its brutal occupation of Palestinian lands. Sanders favors continued aid to Israel. He supported Israel's 2014 massacre in Gaza, during which the United Nations Human Rights Council documented the deaths of 2,251 Palestinians, including 1,462 civilians (299 women and 551 children), and the injuring of 11,231 Palestinians, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children. Ten percent of the children suffered a permanent disability as a result of violence inflicted during that massacre, and more than 1,500 Gazan children were orphaned.

Sanders voted against the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but he voted for the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force in Afghanistan.

Quoting "official Israeli sources," the UN Human Rights Council reported, "rockets and mortars hit civilian buildings and infrastructure, including schools and houses, causing direct damage to civilian property amounting to almost \$25 million." In addition, the UN Council found 18,000 housing units were totally or partially destroyed; much of the electrical, water and sanitation infrastructure was incapacitated; and 73 medical facilities and several ambulances were damaged. Twenty-eight percent of the Palestinian population was displaced.

Sanders voted against the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but he voted for the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force in Afghanistan. And he has spoken out strongly in favor of providing military aid to Ukraine and mounting airstrikes against ISIS.

Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein's domestic policies are nearly indistinguishable from Sanders'. But Stein, who is also Jewish, opposes military assistance to Israel that is used to "fund a government which is basically committing war crimes against the Palestinian people, violating human rights, violating international law with the occupations," she told Tavis Smiley on PBS. In 2012, Stein noted on Democracy Now! that she "would not be funding the weapons used in the massacre of Gaza." Stein said, "We need to start raising the bar for Israel and holding them to an equal standard for supporting human rights and international law and ending occupations and illegal settlements and apartheid." Stein also opposes the provision of weapons to Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Sanders, on the other hand, has taken a more consistently militarist position. "I believe the United States should have the strongest military in the world," he declared on ABC News. "We should be working with other countries in coalition. And when people threaten the United States, or threaten our allies, or commit genocide, the United States with other

countries should be prepared to act militarily.”

Sanders knows you have to talk tough to get elected. After all, since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the US government has kept Americans in a constant state of fear. The United States maintains a culture of war. Indeed, Sanders said, “I supported the use of force in Afghanistan to hunt down the terrorists who attacked us.” But none of the hijackers hailed from Afghanistan. Fifteen of the 19 were from Saudi Arabia, a close US ally.

Sanders supports the use of drones “selectively.” However, as Stein told Smiley, Obama says he is using them selectively. But by killing so many innocents, Obama is creating even more enemies for the United States.

Sanders supports the United States’ \$3 trillion weapons program, including the controversial F-35 fighter jets, which brings jobs to his state of Vermont. And he supports US efforts to bomb ISIS in Syria, which have exacerbated the violence in that country.

Stein, meanwhile, criticized US attacks in Syria for perpetuating a “cycle of violence that has no end” during her appearance on RT’s “Watching the Hawks.” “Doing more of what caused ISIS is not going to be the solution of solving ISIS,” she said. “When you can trace this problem back to more bombing and violence ... that just creates more violence.”

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Stein advocates a foreign policy based on diplomacy, international law and human rights. She wants to “end the wars and drone attacks, cut military spending by at least 50 percent, and close the 700+ foreign military bases that are turning our republic into a bankrupt empire.” And she seeks to “stop U.S. support and arms sales to human rights abusers, and lead on global nuclear disarmament.”

Stein has no chance of winning the election. So why do her positions matter? She is the declared candidate of the Green Party. If Stein’s voice is included in the national debates, the other candidates will be publicly challenged and forced to respond on critical foreign policy issues.

When Stein ran for president in 2012, she was arrested at one of the debates “simply for showing up.” Stein told Democracy Now!’s Amy Goodman that she was then “sent to a dark site, surrounded by 16 Secret Service and police, handcuffed tightly to metal chairs for about eight hours, until the crowds had gone home.” Why? “They were afraid that word would get out that people actually have a choice that reflects their deeply held beliefs and values.”

The League of Women Voters ran the presidential debates through the 1984 election. In 1987, the Republican and Democratic parties created the Commission on Presidential Debates to set rules to exclude third parties and independents from the debates. The Commission controls every aspect of the debate – the questions, the audience and the press. But although the League was invited to sponsor the 1988 debate, it pulled out due to complex rules and restrictions, stating the League had “no intention of becoming an accessory to the hoodwinking of the American public” and calling it a “fraud.”

The Commission on Presidential Debates is, Stein informed Smiley, “a front group for the

Democratic and Republican parties,” noting, “50 percent of Americans don’t identify as Republican or Democratic.” But, she observed, half the delegates at the conventions are superdelegates not accountable to voters. Thus, she said, they won’t let Sanders be nominated. “The Democratic Party,” according to Stein, “continues to march to the right and become more of a corporatist party, more of an imperialist party, more of a militarist party.”

The Commission allows only those candidates who demonstrate at least 15 percent support in the polls. But Stein noted on RT you can’t get to 15 percent without corporate sponsorship. The Republican and Democratic parties, she added, “are sponsored by big banks, fossil fuels, and war profiteers.”

The Green Party has joined the Libertarian Party and Level the Playing Field, the successor group to Americans Elect, in lawsuits seeking to open the debates. They are suing the Federal Election Commission and the Commission on Presidential Debates, alleging First Amendment and antitrust violations.

We would do well to heed the admonition of John Adams: “There is nothing which I dread so much as a division of the republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader, and concerting measures in opposition to each other. This, in my humble apprehension, is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our Constitution.”

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