

Why Won't "Progressive" US Presidential Candidate Bernie Sanders Talk About War?

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If your local city or town government spent 54% of its funds on an immoral, disastrous, and unpopular project, and your brave, populist, socialist candidate for mayor virtually never acknowledged its existence, would you think something was wrong? Would his admirable positions on numerous smaller projects, and on sources of revenue, ring a little hollow?

Bernie Sanders was asked a while back about the military budget and was essentially accused of wanting to cut it by 50%. Oh no, he replied, I wouldn't do that. He ought to have replied that doing that would leave the United States far and away the world's biggest military spender, and that doing that would take U.S. military spending back to roughly 2001 levels. He ought to have mentioned that the savings of hundreds of billions of dollars could transform the United States and the world for the better, that tens of billions could end starvation and provide clean water worldwide, and end poverty at home, and fund projects like free college, and invest in green energy beyond the wildest dreams of its advocates. He ought to have quoted Eisenhower and pointed out the record of the past 14 years of military spending generating wars rather than preventing them. In other words, he ought to have given the sort of smart response he gives to the questions he's usually asked on the topics he prefers to deal with.



But this was militarism, and militarism is different. Sanders' record is better than that of most presidential candidates, but very mixed. He's gotten into shouting matches with his constituents over his support for Israeli wars fought with billions of dollars of free U.S. weapons. He's supported incredibly wasteful military spending in his state. He opposes some wars, backs others, and glorifies militarism and the "service" that veterans have supposedly provided. While the public would like to fund useful projects and tax cuts for working people by both taxing the rich and slashing the military, Sanders only ever mentions taxing the rich. If he doesn't want to cut the largest item in the budget by 50%, how much does he want to cut it by? Or does he want to increase it? Who knows. His speeches — at least most of them — and certainly his campaign website, never acknowledge that wars and militarism exist at all. When people have pressed him during Q&A sections of events, he's proposed auditing the Department of so-called Defense. But what about cutting it? He's proposed addressing veteran suicides. What about creating no more veterans?

At [RootsAction.org](#) we've just launched a petition urging Sanders to speak on war and militarism. [Thousands have already signed it here](#). The vote on the Iran deal could come down to 13 Democratic senators, and I haven't heard Sanders whipping his colleagues at all.

His eloquence and energy are needed now. Having voted the right way will not look like enough when another war has started.

Thousands of eloquent comments can be read [at the petition site](#). Here are a handful:

The president is the nation's chief foreign policy architect and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. A presidential candidate, to be credible, must enunciate her or his approach to foreign policy and the use of military power with as much clarity and specificity as she or he devotes to domestic policy. A bird with only one wing cannot soar. Neither can a presidential candidate without a foreign policy. —Michael Eisenscher, Oakland, CA

Bernie, Militarism is driven by both the American Empire and the military/industrial complex, the huge corporations you correctly speak against. Include militarism in your critique of capitalism. The U.S. is responsible for up to 78% of foreign arms sales; you must denounce this as you denounce banks, and other corporate power. — Joseph Gainza, VT

Bernie, please speak out for peace. If you do, I'll send you \$\$ —Carol Wolman, CA

I loved your speech and enthusiasm in Madison, and was disappointed you said nothing about foreign policy. — Dick Russo, WI

I am thrilled you are running. I agree with you on most things, but I would like to hear something about the necessity of ending all these endless wars with oversized military budgets, which are part of the economic problem! — Dorothy Rocklin, MA

You will have to say something eventually. Do it sooner. — Michael Japack, OH

He must comment upon the war on Gaza by Israel, which is connected to not only 'the madness of militarism' but also to the racism that the Palestinians and African-Americans face from these two nuclear powers. — Robert Bonazzi, TX

This needs to be made a major issue in the coming campaign, especially given the situation re: the deal with Iran and efforts by warmongers (especially the Israeli lobby) to scuttle it. That's not the only example that comes to mind, but it's a hot-button issue and it needs to be addressed, not ignored. — James Kenny, NY

Bernie, You know better, start talking about our endless wars and our ballooning military budget, also take a stand on the Iran deal! Domestic policy and foreign policy go hand in hand. —Eva Havas, RI

Two wars have been economically disastrous for America. A third war (Iran) could shred the nation's social fabric, as well. Foreign aid, esp. military aid, to countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel, further destabilizes the region and ensures that liberal reforms will never take hold. So, yes, it's important that you speak up, and in no uncertain terms. —Richard Hovey, MI

The US military is the largest single user of fossil fuels ... so continued WAR endangers the planet in more ways than one! Speak UP! — Frank Lahorgue, CA

Please include a denunciation of Israel's continued land grab for settlements and unconscionable treatment of Palestinians in Gaza. —Louise Chegwiddden, CA

Keep pressing Senator Sanders on these vital issues! —James Bradford, MD

We will!

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