

# The Clinton/Trump AIPAC ‘Pander-Off’

**Exclusive:** While Sen. Sanders stressed the need for a nuanced approach to the Middle East, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump competed to see who could avow their love for Israel more ardently, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

At the annual AIPAC convention, the Democratic and Republican front-runners engaged in what might be called a “pander-off” as Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump tried to outdo the other in declaring their love and devotion to Israel.

Yet, what was perhaps most troubling about the two dueling speeches was the absence of any significant sympathy for the Palestinian people or any substantive criticism of the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

By contrast, Sen. Bernie Sanders, who did not attend the AIPAC convention, delivered a foreign policy speech in Salt Lake City, Utah, that struck a more balanced tone and placed part of the blame for the Mideast problems on the policies of Netanyahu’s right-wing government.

However, in Washington before thousands of cheering attendees at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee convention on Monday, Clinton, Trump and two other Republican candidates, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Ohio Gov. John Kasich, were in full pander mode.

For instance, former Secretary of State Clinton depicted Israel as entirely an innocent victim in the Mideast conflicts. “As we gather here, three evolving threats – Iran’s continued aggression, a rising tide of extremism across a wide arc of instability, and the growing effort to de-legitimize Israel on the world stage – are converging to make the U.S.-Israel alliance more indispensable than ever,” she declared.

“The United States and Israel must be closer than ever, stronger than ever and more determined than ever to prevail against our common adversaries and to advance our shared values. ... This is especially true at a time when Israel faces brutal terrorist stabbings, shootings and vehicle attacks at home. Parents worry about letting their children walk down the street. Families live in fear.”

Yet, Clinton made no reference to Palestinian parents who worry about their children walking down the street or playing on a beach and facing the possibility of sudden death from an Israeli drone or warplane. Instead, she scolded Palestinian adults. “Palestinian leaders need to stop inciting violence,

stop celebrating terrorists as martyrs and stop paying rewards to their families," she said.

Then, Clinton promised to put her future administration at the service of the Israeli government, asking: "The first choice is this: are we prepared to take the U.S./Israel alliance to the next level?"

Clinton said, "One of the first things I'll do in office is invite the Israeli prime minister to visit the White House. And I will send a delegation from the Pentagon and the Joint Chiefs to Israel for early consultations. Let's also expand our collaboration beyond security."

Clinton lashed out at the global boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement which has sought to convince Israel to respect the human and political rights of Palestinians by applying economic and moral pressure on Israeli businesses. Yet, instead of a non-violent movement to achieve change in the Israeli-Palestinian dynamic, Clinton saw anti-Semitism.

"Particularly at a time when anti-Semitism is on the rise across the world, especially in Europe, we must repudiate all efforts to malign, isolate and undermine Israel and the Jewish people," she said, adding: "we have to be united in fighting back against BDS."

Clinton also indirectly criticized Trump for having said earlier in the campaign that the United States should be "neutral" in its handling of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians.

"Yes, we need steady hands, not a president who says he's neutral on Monday, pro-Israel on Tuesday, and who knows what on Wednesday, because everything's negotiable," Clinton declared.

### **Trump's No-Pander Pander**

Speaking after Clinton's appearance, Trump asserted that "I didn't come here tonight to pander to you about Israel. That's what politicians do: all talk, no action. Believe me."

Trump then took on the challenge of out-pandering Clinton. Trump pandered to Israel's hatred of Iran, vowing "to dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran" restraining its nuclear program. He also pandered about Iran's role in terrorism.

"They've got terror cells everywhere, including in the Western Hemisphere, very close to home," Trump said. "Iran is the biggest sponsor of terrorism around the world. And we will work to dismantle that reach, believe me, believe me."

However, in the real world, Iran has actually assisted the governments of Iraq and Syria in battling the Islamic State and Al Qaeda, while Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and – to a lesser degree – Israel have provided help to Sunni jihadists, especially in Syria, to counter what the Sunni-led states and Israel see as excessive Shiite influence in the Middle East.

In his pandering, Trump also exposed his ignorance about Israeli-Palestinian history. He asserted, “There is no moral equivalency [between the Israelis and the Palestinians]. Israel does not name public squares after terrorists.”

But that’s not exactly true. The most revered Israeli leader, in terms of having his name attached to streets, squares and parks, is Ze’ev Jabotinsky, founder and leader of the Irgun, a terror group that fought for the founding of Israel. Jabotinsky has some 57 sites named for him.

One of his Irgun followers, Menachem Begin, has his name commemorated in at least 43 communities. Similarly, Yitzhak Shamir, a leader of Lehi (also known as the Stern Gang), a terror group that joined with the Irgun in carrying out ethnic cleansing of Palestinians including the infamous Deir Yassin massacre, has his name attached to a Jerusalem highway.

But more significant than the honorific naming of public sites is the fact that Begin and Shamir were elected as Israeli prime ministers. In other words, Israel doesn’t just honor its terrorists by naming public squares after them; it gave them the power to direct military actions against Palestinians and other people in the region, including Begin’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon, which led to the Sabra and Shatila massacres of Palestinians.

But Trump’s pandering even extended to mentioning his and his family’s longtime devotion to Israel, including a reference to his daughter marrying an Orthodox Jew, converting to Judaism and now pregnant: “I love the people in this room. I love Israel. I love Israel. I’ve been with Israel so long in terms of I’ve received some of my greatest honors from Israel, my father before me, incredible. My daughter, Ivanka, is about to have a beautiful Jewish baby.”

### **Respecting the Palestinians**

By contrast, Sanders, the only Jewish candidate and someone who lived on an Israeli kibbutz as a young man, did not attend the AIPAC conference, citing a scheduling conflict for his campaign which was hoping to close Clinton’s formidable delegate lead with strong showings in Utah, Idaho and Arizona.

Instead, Sanders gave a foreign policy speech that he claimed he would have given if he had addressed the AIPAC convention. While critical of Iranian and Palestinian leaders, Sanders offered a much more evenhanded assessment of the

reasons for the troubled Middle East.

Sanders stressed that his overall approach to the region would be to emphasize diplomacy among the Mideast countries instead of concentrating on threats and the use of force. He also called for a recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.

“To be successful, we have also got to be a friend not only to Israel, but to the Palestinian people, where in Gaza unemployment today is 44 percent and we have there a poverty rate which is almost as high,” the Vermont senator said. “You can’t have good policy that results in peace if you ignore one side.”

While insisting on security for Israel, Sanders said, “peace also means security for every Palestinian. It means achieving self-determination, civil rights, and economic well-being for the Palestinian people. Peace will mean ending what amounts to the occupation of Palestinian territory, establishing mutually agreed upon borders, and pulling back settlements in the West Bank. ... It is absurd for elements within the Netanyahu government to suggest that building more settlements in the West Bank is the appropriate response to the most recent violence.”

Sanders also touched on other sensitive issues that Clinton and Trump avoided. Sanders said, “Peace will also mean ending the economic blockade of Gaza. And it will mean a sustainable and equitable distribution of precious water resources so that Israel and Palestine can both thrive as neighbors.

“Right now, Israel controls 80 percent of the water reserves in the West Bank. Inadequate water supply has contributed to the degradation and desertification of Palestinian land. A lasting peace will have to recognize Palestinians are entitled to control their own lives and there is nothing human life needs more than water.”

Sanders continued, “Peace will require strict adherence by both sides to the tenets of international humanitarian law. This includes Israel ending disproportionate responses to being attacked – even though any attack on Israel is unacceptable.”

While condemning rocket fire from Gaza into Israel in 2014, Sanders added, “let me also be very clear: I – along with many supporters of Israel – spoke out strongly against the Israeli counter attacks that killed nearly 1,500 civilians and wounded thousands more. I condemned the bombing of hospitals, schools and refugee camps. Today, Gaza is still largely in ruins. The international community must come together to help Gaza recover.”

Regarding his earlier comments about wealthy Sunni-led oil states taking on a

greater regional role in fighting jihadist extremism, such as Islamic State terrorists, Sanders clarified, "Now, I am not suggesting that Saudi Arabia or any other states in the region invade other countries, nor unilaterally intervene in conflicts driven in part by sectarian tensions.

"What I am saying is that the major powers in the region – especially the Gulf States – have to take greater responsibility for the future of the Middle East and the defeat of ISIS. ... What I am also saying is that other countries in the region – like Saudi Arabia, which has the fourth largest defense budget in the world – has to dedicate itself more fully to the destruction of ISIS, instead of other military adventures like the one it is pursuing right now in Yemen."

Sanders also distanced himself from Hillary Clinton who has urged a U.S. military bombing campaign against the Syrian government, or as she tries to sell the idea as a "safe zone" or a "no-fly zone" though U.S. military officials say either idea would require a major aerial assault on Syria's air force and air defenses.

In contrast, Sanders said, "After five years of brutal conflict, the only solution in Syria will be, in my view, a negotiated political settlement. Those who advocate for stronger military involvement by the U.S. to oust Assad from power have not paid close enough attention to history. That would simply prolong the war and increase the chaos in Syria, not end it."

Sanders even envisioned working with Russia and Iran to stabilize Syria, defeat ISIS and arrange a transitional government, adding:

"I applaud Secretary Kerry and the Obama administration for negotiating a partial ceasefire between the Assad regime and most opposition forces. The ceasefire shows the value of American-led diplomacy, rather than escalating violence. It may not seem like a lot, but it is. Diplomacy in this instance has had some real success."

Overall, Sanders advocated less reliance on "regime change" strategies that require military force, saying: "In my view, the military option for a powerful nation like ours – the most powerful nation in the world – should always be on the table. That's why we have the most powerful military in the world. But it should always be the last resort not the first resort. ...

"You know it is very easy for politicians to go before the people and talk about how tough we are, and we want to wipe out everybody else. But I think if we have learned anything from history is that we pursue every diplomatic option before we resort to military intervention. And interestingly enough, more often than not, diplomacy can achieve goals that military intervention cannot achieve."

Sanders may have waited too long to give a detailed foreign policy speech, letting Clinton mostly off the hook for her neoconservative tendencies and her support for “regime change” wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria. Most political analysts say he is too far behind in the delegate count to catch up even if his campaign catches on fire in the later primary states, such as California and New York.

Only now has Sanders explained in detail his more nuanced approach toward the Israel-Palestine conflict and his more dovish attitude toward using American military force, in contrast to Clinton’s one-sided attitude toward Israel and her hawkish talk about exerting U.S. power.

Indeed, Clinton’s neocon-style speech to AIPAC could be the first sign of her long-awaited “pivot to the center,” now that she has amassed such a strong lead that she feels she no longer has to worry about the Democratic Party’s liberal base.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

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## Start of a New World War

Propaganda about Russian and Chinese “aggression” has cloaked the reality of the U.S. and the West moving aggressively to encircle both countries, the start of a new world war, says John Pilger.

By John Pilger

I have been filming in the Marshall Islands, which lie north of Australia, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Whenever I tell people where I have been, they ask, “Where is that?” If I offer a clue by referring to “Bikini,” they say, “You mean the swimsuit.”

Few seem aware that the bikini swimsuit was named to celebrate the nuclear explosions that destroyed Bikini island. Sixty-six nuclear devices were exploded by the United States in the Marshall Islands between 1946 and 1958 – the equivalent of 1.6 Hiroshima bombs every day for 12 years.

Bikini is silent today, mutated and contaminated. Palm trees grow in a strange grid formation. Nothing moves. There are no birds. The headstones in the old

cemetery are alive with radiation. My shoes registered "unsafe" on a Geiger counter.

Standing on the beach, I watched the emerald green of the Pacific fall away into a vast black hole. This was the crater left by the hydrogen bomb they called "Bravo." The explosion poisoned people and their environment for hundreds of miles, perhaps forever.

On my return journey, I stopped at Honolulu airport and noticed an American magazine called *Women's Health*. On the cover was a smiling woman in a bikini swimsuit, and the headline: "You, too, can have a bikini body." A few days earlier, in the Marshall Islands, I had interviewed women who had very different "bikini bodies"; each had suffered thyroid cancer and other life-threatening cancers.

Unlike the smiling woman in the magazine, all of them were impoverished: the victims and guinea pigs of a rapacious superpower that is today more dangerous than ever.

I relate this experience as a warning and to interrupt a distraction that has consumed so many of us. The founder of modern propaganda, Edward Bernays, described this phenomenon as "the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the habits and opinions" of democratic societies. He called it an "invisible government".

How many people are aware that a world war has begun? At present, it is a war of propaganda, of lies and distraction, but this can change instantaneously with the first mistaken order, the first missile.

In 2009, President Obama stood before an adoring crowd in the centre of Prague, in the heart of Europe. He pledged himself to make "the world free from nuclear weapons." People cheered and some cried. A torrent of platitudes flowed from the media. Obama was subsequently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. It was all fake. He was lying.

The Obama administration has built more nuclear weapons, more nuclear warheads, more nuclear delivery systems, more nuclear factories. Nuclear warhead spending alone rose higher under Obama than under any American president. The cost over 30 years is more than \$1 trillion.

A mini nuclear bomb is planned. It is known as the B61 Model 12. There has never been anything like it. General James Cartwright, a former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said, "Going smaller [makes using this nuclear] weapon more thinkable."

In the last 18 months, the greatest build-up of military forces since World War Two – led by the United States – is taking place along Russia’s western frontier. Not since Hitler invaded the Soviet Union have foreign troops presented such a demonstrable threat to Russia.

Ukraine – once part of the Soviet Union – has become a CIA theme park. Having orchestrated a coup in Kiev, Washington effectively controls a regime that is next door and hostile to Russia: a regime rotten with Nazis, literally. Prominent parliamentary figures in Ukraine are the political descendants of the notorious OUN and UPA fascists. They openly praise Hitler and call for the persecution and expulsion of the Russian-speaking minority.

This is seldom news in the West, or it is inverted to suppress the truth.

In Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – next door to Russia – the U.S. military is deploying combat troops, tanks, heavy weapons. This extreme provocation of the world’s second nuclear power is met with silence in the West.

What makes the prospect of nuclear war even *more* dangerous is a parallel campaign against China. Seldom a day passes when China is not elevated to the status of a “threat.” According to Admiral Harry Harris, the U.S. Pacific commander, China is “building a great wall of sand in the South China Sea.”

What he is referring to is China building airstrips in the Spratly Islands, which are the subject of a dispute with the Philippines – a dispute without priority until Washington pressured and bribed the government in Manila and the Pentagon launched a propaganda campaign called “freedom of navigation.”

What does this really mean? It means freedom for American warships to patrol and dominate the coastal waters of China. Try to imagine the American reaction if Chinese warships did the same off the coast of California.

I made a film called *The War You Don’t See*, in which I interviewed distinguished journalists in America and Britain: reporters such as Dan Rather of CBS, Rageh Omar of the BBC, David Rose of the *Observer*.

All of them said that had journalists and broadcasters done their job and questioned the propaganda that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction; had the lies of George W. Bush and Tony Blair not been amplified and echoed by journalists, the 2003 invasion of Iraq might not have happened, and hundreds of thousands of men, women and children would be alive today.

The propaganda laying the ground for a war against Russia and/or China is no different in principle. To my knowledge, no journalist in the Western “mainstream” – a Dan Rather equivalent, say – asks *why* China is building



airstrips in the South China Sea.

The answer ought to be glaringly obvious. The United States is encircling China with a network of bases, with ballistic missiles, battle groups, nuclear-armed bombers.

This lethal arc extends from Australia to the islands of the Pacific, the Marianas and the Marshalls and Guam, to the Philippines, Thailand, Okinawa, Korea and across Eurasia to Afghanistan and India. America has hung a noose around the neck of China. This is not news. Silence by media; war by media.

In 2015, in high secrecy, the U.S. and Australia staged the biggest single air-sea military exercise in recent history, known as Talisman Sabre. Its aim was to rehearse an Air-Sea Battle Plan, blocking sea lanes, such as the Straits of Malacca and the Lombok Straits, that cut off China's access to oil, gas and other vital raw materials from the Middle East and Africa.

In the circus known as the American presidential campaign, Donald Trump is being presented as a lunatic, a fascist. He is certainly odious; but he is also a media-hate figure. That alone should arouse our skepticism. Trump's views on migration are grotesque, but no more grotesque than those of British Prime Minister David Cameron. It is not Trump who is the Great Deporter from the United States, but the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Barack Obama.

According to one prodigious liberal commentator, Trump is "unleashing the dark forces of violence" in the United States. *Unleashing* them?

This is the country where toddlers shoot their mothers and the police wage a murderous war against black Americans. This is the country that has attacked and sought to overthrow more than 50 governments, many of them democracies, and bombed from Asia to the Middle East, causing the deaths and dispossession of millions of people.

No country can equal this systemic record of violence. Most of America's wars (almost all of them against defenseless countries) have been launched not by Republican presidents but by liberal Democrats: Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, Clinton, Obama.

In 1947, a series of National Security Council directives described the paramount aim of American foreign policy as "a world substantially made over in [America's] own image." The ideology was messianic Americanism. We were all Americans. Or else. Heretics would be converted, subverted, bribed, smeared or crushed.

Donald Trump is a symptom of this, but he is also a maverick. He says the

invasion of Iraq was a crime; he doesn't want to go to war with Russia and China. The danger to the rest of us is not Trump, but Hillary Clinton. She is no maverick. She embodies the resilience and violence of a *system* whose vaunted "exceptionalism" is totalitarian with an occasional liberal face.

As presidential Election Day draws near, Clinton will be hailed as the first female president, regardless of her crimes and lies – just as Barack Obama was lauded as the first black president and liberals swallowed his nonsense about "hope." And the drool goes on.

Described by the *Guardian* columnist Owen Jones as "funny, charming, with a coolness that eludes practically every other politician," Obama the other day sent drones to slaughter 150 people in Somalia. He kills people usually on Tuesdays, according to the *New York Times*, when he is handed a list of candidates for death by drone. So cool.

In the 2008 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton threatened to "totally obliterate" Iran with nuclear weapons. As Secretary of State under Obama, she participated in the overthrow of the democratic government of Honduras. Her contribution to the destruction of Libya in 2011 was almost gleeful. When the Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, was publicly sodomized with a knife – a murder made possible by American logistics – Clinton gloated over his death: "We came, we saw, he died."

One of Clinton's closest allies is Madeleine Albright, the former Secretary of State, who has attacked young women for not supporting "Hillary." This is the same Madeleine Albright who infamously celebrated on TV the death of half a million Iraqi children as "worth it".

Among Clinton's biggest backers are the Israel lobby and the arms companies that fuel the violence in the Middle East. She and her husband have received a fortune from Wall Street. And yet, she is about to be ordained the women's candidate, to see off the evil Trump, the official demon. Her supporters include distinguished feminists: the likes of Gloria Steinem in the U.S. and Anne Summers in Australia.

A generation ago, a post-modern cult now known as "identity politics" stopped many intelligent, liberal-minded people examining the causes and individuals they supported – such as the fakery of Obama and Clinton; such as bogus progressive movements like Syriza in Greece, which betrayed the people of that country and allied with their enemies.

Self-absorption, a kind of "me-ism," became the new Zeitgeist in privileged Western societies and signaled the demise of great collective movements against

war, social injustice, inequality, racism and sexism.

Today, the long sleep may be over. The young are stirring again. Gradually. The thousands in Britain who supported Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader are part of this awakening – as are those who rallied to support Sen. Bernie Sanders.

In Britain last week, Jeremy Corbyn's closest ally, his shadow treasurer John McDonnell, committed a Labour government to pay off the debts of piratical banks and, in effect, to continue so-called austerity.

In the U.S., Bernie Sanders has promised to support Clinton if or when she's nominated. He, too, has voted for America's use of violence against countries when he thinks it's "right." He says Obama has done "a great job."

In Australia, there is a kind of mortuary politics, in which tedious parliamentary games are played out in the media while refugees and Indigenous people are persecuted and inequality grows, along with the danger of war. The government of Malcolm Turnbull has just announced a so-called defense budget of \$195 billion that is a drive to war. There was no debate. Silence.

What has happened to the great tradition of popular direct action, unfettered to parties? Where is the courage, the imagination and the commitment required to begin the long journey to a better, just and peaceful world? Where are the dissidents in art, film, the theatre, literature?

Where are those who will shatter the silence? Or do we wait until the first nuclear missile is fired?

**This is an edited version of an address by John Pilger at the University of Sydney, entitled "A World War Has Begun." [JohnPilger.com](http://JohnPilger.com) – the films and [journalism of John Pilger](#).**

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