

Why a Bernie 2020 Campaign is Drawing Fire

Sanders is in step with most Americans, says Norman Solomon, and that bothers the defenders of oligarchy.

By **Norman Solomon**

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With a launch of the Bernie Sanders 2020 campaign on the near horizon, efforts to block his trajectory to the Democratic presidential nomination are intensifying. The lines of attack are already aggressive – and often contradictory.

One media meme says that the senator from Vermont made so much headway in moving the Democratic Party leftward with his 2016 presidential bid that he's no longer anything special. We're supposed to believe that candidates who've adjusted their sails to the latest political wind are just as good as the candidate who generated the wind in the first place.

Bloomberg News supplied the typical spin in a Feb. 8 article headlined "[Sanders Risks Getting Crowded Out in 2020 Field of Progressives.](#)" The piece laid out the narrative: "Sanders may find himself a victim of his own success in driving the party to the left with his 2016 run. The field of Democratic presidential hopefuls includes at least a half-dozen candidates who've adopted in whole or in part the platform that helped Sanders build a loyal following . . ."

Yet Bernie is also being targeted as too marginal. The same *Bloomberg* article quoted Howard Dean, a long-ago liberal

favorite who has become a hawkish lobbyist and corporate mouthpiece: “There will be hardcore, hard left progressives who will have nobody but Bernie, but there won’t be many.”

So, is Bernie now too much like other Democratic presidential candidates, or is he too much of an outlier? In the mass media, both seem to be true. In the real world, neither are true.

Last week, *Business Insider* reported on new polling about Sanders’ proposal “to increase the estate tax, the tax paid by heirs on assets passed down by the deceased. Sanders’ idea would lower the threshold to qualify for the tax to \$3.5 million in assets, down from the current \$11 million. The plan would also introduce a graduating scale of tax rates for the estates of wealthier Americans, eventually reaching a 77 percent marginal rate for assets over \$1 billion.”

Here are the poll results: “When presented with the details of the proposal, 37 percent of respondents supported Sanders’ policy while 26 percent opposed, according to *Insider’s* survey.” (The rest had no opinion.)

Giving Voice to Majority Views

That kind of response from the public is a far cry from claims that Sanders is somehow fringe. In fact, the ferocity of media attacks on him often indicates that corporate power brokers are afraid his strong progressive populism is giving effective voice to majority views of the public.

A vast range of grassroots organizing – outside and inside

of electoral arenas – has created the current leftward momentum. “As a progressive, it is heartening to see so many other candidates voice support for Senator Sanders’ policies,” said Alan Minsky, executive director at Progressive Democrats of America. “However, I’ve been around the block enough times to know that politicians who adopt positions in tune with the fashion of the moment are not as trustworthy as those rare few, like Bernie Sanders, who have held firm to a powerful social justice vision through his entire long career.”

I also asked for a comment from Pia Gallegos, former chair of the Adeline Progressive Caucus of the New Mexico Democratic Party. “Bernie’s competitors lack his track record on economic security for all American workers, Medicare for All, free public college education, taxing the rich and opposing bloated military budgets,” she said. “Those are long-standing positions that – more than ever – resonate with grassroots activists and voters. Other Democratic presidential candidates will try to imitate this populist agenda, but only Bernie can speak with the vision, clarity and moral authority that the Democratic Party’s presidential candidate needs to defeat the incumbent.”

The overarching fear that defenders of oligarchy have about Bernie Sanders is not that he’s out of step with most Americans – it’s that he’s *in* step with them. For corporate elites determined to retain undemocratic power, a successful Bernie 2020 campaign would be the worst possible outcome of the election.

Norman Solomon is cofounder and national coordinator of RootsAction.org. He was a Bernie Sanders delegate from

California to the 2016 Democratic National Convention and is currently a coordinator of the relaunched Bernie Delegates Network. Solomon is the author of a dozen books, including “War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.” He is the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy.

Elizabeth Warren Nails Economy, Muddles Foreign Policy

It’s imperative to criticize presumable progressive politicians and parse their words carefully. It might open the door to actual improvements in policy, writes Sam Hussein.

By Sam Hussein

Post Haven



In her New Year’s Eve announcement about forming an exploratory committee for the presidency, Sen. Elizabeth Warren made a great point: “Right now, Washington works great for the wealthy and the well-connected. It’s just not working for anyone else.”

In case you missed that, she did not say “the economy isn’t working well” or such, as we’ve all heard numerous politicians say countless times.

She rather said the opposite of that; repeatedly: “The way I see it right now, Washington works great for giant drug companies, but just not for people who are trying to get a

prescription filled. Washington works great for for-profit colleges and student loan outfits, but not for young people who are getting crushed by student loan debt. And you could keep going through the list. The problem we have got right now in Washington is that it works great for those who've got money to buy influence."

And in case anyone missed the point, she said it yet again: "We want a government that works not just for the rich and the powerful. We want a government that works for everyone."

It's laudatory that Warren is using her perch and analytical skills to avoid a common rhetorical trap and is articulating the truism that the political establishment largely does the bidding of the wealthy and connected when it comes to the economy.

Silent on War Profiteers

The problem is that she doesn't articulate that in the same manner when it comes to bloody wars. Quite the contrary. Her list of problems—drug companies, for-profit colleges and student loan outfits—omits those who have an interest in continuing horrific wars.

When asked on Wednesday night by Rachel Maddow about Trump's recent announcement on pulling troops from Syria, Warren said the U.S.'s wars are "not working."

She didn't say: "The wars are working great for military contractors, just not for regular people in the U.S. or Syria or anywhere else."

Warren—who is on the Senate Armed Services Committee—did not say: "The wars are great for the wealthy profiting off of

them, they're just terrible for the people getting killed in them."

Instead, Warren actually swallowed some of the rhetoric about U.S. wars having as their alleged goals stability or humanitarianism or security. The profits of military contractors or geopolitical elites went unexamined.

She said it was "right" to pull U.S. troops out of Syria and Afghanistan, an arguably positive position, but added: "It is not working and pretending that somehow, in the future, it is going to work...it's a form of fantasy that we simply can't afford to continue to engage in."

Ignoring War Mongering

But part of the fantasy is ignoring that the wars are indeed working great for some. Indeed, if Warren heard someone else say that "it is not working" about the economy, she'd likely correct them.

Warren did at least raise the question of what "success" in the perpetual wars might be, which is certainly better than most of official Washington. Advocates of perpetual war "need to explain what they think winning in those wars look like and where the metrics are," she said.

But, like most of the U.S. political establishment, Warren doesn't actually scrutinize the underlying motives: "When you withdraw, you got to withdraw as part of a plan, you got to know what you're trying to accomplish throughout the Middle East and the pieces need to be coordinated," Warren said, adding, "this is why we need allies."

What allies? France, Britain and Turkey—the traditional

colonial power in the region? Or the ever-aggressive, oppressive Israel? Or the tyrannical Saudi Arabia?

And that's rather the point. U.S. foreign policy appears as a muddle—without any clear statement of what is supposed to be accomplished—because its stated goals obscure actual goals.

The idea that the U.S. establishment gets the country into wars for ulterior financial or geopolitical reasons should be regarded as banal. Instead, it's barely articulated at all.

Most obviously, the military contractors benefit from wars.

Weapons Versus Drugs

Indeed, the power of the euphemistically called "defense sector" would seem to be substantially larger than the drug companies Warren focuses on. According to OpenSecrets.org, the top five military contractors – Northrop Grumman, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics and Raytheon—more than doubled the top five companies in the pharmaceutical manufacturing sector (\$14.4 million vs. \$7.7 million) in their outlays to politicians. For more, see the writings of William Hartung, such as "Corporate Patriots or War Profiteers?"

Even more critically, the U.S. establishment's geopolitical aims frequently thrive on war. Dahlia Wasfi argued in 2015 in "Battling ISIS: Iran-Iraq war redux" that "Obama's unofficial strategy to fight ISIS may be that of former President Ronald Reagan's for Iran and Iraq in the 1980s: a long, drawn-out war to strengthen U.S.-Israeli hegemony in

the region.” Also, see Robert Naiman’s [“WikiLeaks Reveals How the U.S. Aggressively Pursued Regime Change in Syria, Igniting a Bloodbath”](#) and my own [“Is U.S. Policy to Prolong the Syrian War?”](#)

In 2015, Sen. Bernie Sanders was actually calling for more Saudi intervention in the Mideast. Said Sanders: The Saudis have “got to get their hands dirty.” He was criticized for this by [Margaret Kimberley](#), [David Swanson](#) and [myself](#).

Now, Sanders has taken the lead in Congress in criticizing the Saudi war in Yemen, opening the door to some alleviation of massive suffering. I wish he would be much better still on foreign policy, but this may be serious progress, though the [ACLU has criticized the congressional resolution](#).

It’s imperative to criticize presumable progressive politicians and parse their words carefully. It might open the door to actual improvements in policy, as in the case of Sanders. And in the case of Elizabeth Warren, it’s simply asking her to cease obscuring war as she clarifies economic issues.

Sam Hussein is an independent journalist, senior analyst at the Institute for Public Accuracy, and founder of [VotePact.org](#), which encourages disenchanting Democrats and Republicans to pair up. Follow him on Twitter [@samhusseini](#).

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