

## Bernie Sanders



***“A sensible and effective foreign policy recognizes that our safety and welfare is bound up with the safety and welfare of others around the world. Every person on this planet shares a common humanity. We all want our children to grow up healthy, to have a good education, have decent jobs, drink clean water and breathe clean air, and to live in peace. That’s what being human is about.” — Senator Bernard Sanders***

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### At a Glance

Mayor Bernie Sanders, from his office in Burlington Vermont in the mid-80s, worked to oppose the imperialist interventions of the Reagan era. He visited Nicaragua and spoke out against U.S. intervention as well as championing a city referendum opposing U.S. support for the brutal military regime in El Salvador. In May of this year, after the New York Times wrote an article detailing his anti-imperialist beginnings that some pundits tarred as a gotcha “[anti-American baiting](#)” “[hit piece](#),” Sanders [told the Times](#), “I plead guilty to, throughout my adult life, doing everything I can to prevent war and destruction.”

Sanders has been an outspoken critic of U.S. intervention throughout his political career. He was vigorous and prescient in his opposition to the Iraq war. He correctly predicted the precedent the war set for other interventions in the Middle East, the astronomical costs, and the “unintended consequences” in terms of civil war and destabilization. Sanders also saw the importance of not antagonizing Russia by expending NATO eastward, “Since the Cold War is over,” Sanders [asked on the floor of Congress in 1997](#), “why are we militarily provoking Russia?” Much of the current tensions with Russia can be tied to this ill-fated decision.

However, Sanders has not always voted against U.S. interventions. He supported the U.S. bombing operation in Kosovo and voted for the 2001 Authorization of Use of Military Force after the 9/11 attacks (as did every member of Congress other than Barbara Lee.) Sanders also co-sponsored a Senate resolution that urged “the United Nations Security Council to take

such further action as may be necessary to protect civilians in Libya from attack, including the possible imposition of a no-fly zone.” After the Libya intervention began Sanders was less sanguine, telling FOX news “Everybody understands Gadhafi is a thug and murderer. We want to see him go, but I think in the midst of two wars, I’m not quite sure we need a third war, and I hope the president tells us that our troops will be leaving there, that our military action in Libya will be ending very, very shortly.”

Sanders ran a campaign in 2016, very much focused on domestic issues, but he did work to open up debates about regime change wars including in Libya, and on what he called Israel’s disproportionate attacks on Gaza in 2014 and the need for [a more “even-handed” U.S. policy](#) on Israel and the Palestinian territories. You could see the beginnings of Sanders staking out a more progressive worldview on foreign policy.

But in his 2020 campaign Sanders has outlined a bold new foreign policy vision. He speaks to foreign policy issues arguably more than any other candidate with the exception of his fellow opponent of change wars Tulsi Gabbard. He has gone directly after the militarist habits of the U.S. attacking “mindset” that “military force is decisive in a way that diplomacy is not.” Returning to his anti-interventionist roots, in a [major foreign policy speech at Westminster College](#), he laid out the history of disastrous U.S. interventions that prove that it is a myth that “a “benevolent global hegemony” is the goal of our foreign policy.” He instead calls for “global engagement based on partnership, rather than dominance” based on international cooperation and international institutions like the U.N.

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## Ending Endless War

- Sanders has made “ending endless wars” the centerpiece of his foreign policy platform. In a [Foreign Affairs article](#) outlining this platform, Sanders wrote “But just to end our military interventions in these places is not enough. We need to rethink the militaristic approach that has undermined the United States’ moral authority, caused allies to question our ability to lead, drained our tax coffers, and corroded our own democracy. We must never again engage in torture or indefinite detention, and we must limit the use of drone strikes that too often result in high numbers of civilian casualties, boosting the very terrorist organizations that we aim to defeat. And

we must seriously reinvest in diplomacy and development aid, both of which have been allowed to atrophy under the current administration.”

- Sen. Sanders spearheaded the campaign to pass [S.J.Res. 7](#), legislation directing the president to withdraw U.S. military support for the war in Yemen, and has spoken out repeatedly on the floor of Congress and in the media in support of ending U.S. involvement in the war in Yemen. This legislation passed in both chambers of Congress, marking the first time Congress has successfully sent legislation invoking the War Powers Act to the president’s desk, and advancing the broader goal of Congress reclaiming its constitutional authority over war. President Trump vetoed the legislation. Despite failing to become law, efforts to pass this legislation have significantly increased public scrutiny of the war in Yemen. These efforts have also made a difference for civilians on the ground in Yemen by pressuring the Saudi-led coalition and helping negotiators secure ceasefire agreements that reduce violence and increase access to humanitarian aid.
  - Sanders has consistently called for troops to come home from Iraq and Afghanistan including during the Bush and [Obama](#) administrations.
  - Sanders has opposed military intervention in Venezuela saying that “the United States has got to work with the international community to make sure that there is a free and fair election in Venezuela.” Sanders has been harshly critical of Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro’s policies but pointedly declined to call Maduro a dictator. Sanders also refused to recognize Juan Guaidó, who is backed by the Trump administration, as the legitimate leader of Venezuela. Sanders also points to the long U.S. history of intervention in Latin America as a cautionary tale. Sen. Sanders has cosponsored [S.J.Res. 11](#), legislation to block funding for military action against Venezuela without congressional approval.
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## Nuclear Weapons

- When asked if he would be “capable of using nuclear weapons in defense of the country,” Sanders [response was rightly indignant](#): “The real question is: How the hell do we get rid of these nuclear weapons that are threatening the entire planet? And I would be aggressive in doing that...Right now, we have a president who wants to spend more and more money on the military and more money on nuclear weapons...I want to see us be aggressive in bringing the world together again to figure out how we can substantially not only reduce military spending worldwide, but how we can reduce the ongoing and long-term threat of nuclear weapons.”
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## Iran

- Sanders has campaigned against a possible war with Iran consistently [writing](#) and [appearing on TV](#) to feature his opposition to war with Iran. Sanders has said: “Let me be very clear, I will do everything I can to prevent a war with Iran which would be far worse than disastrous war with Iraq.”
  - Sanders has consistently supported the Iran Nuclear Agreement, and has [said he will reenter the agreement](#) if elected president as long as Iran continues adhering to the terms of the agreement.
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## Pentagon Spending & Diplomatic Funding

- Sanders kicked off his campaign at a rally where he [called for reinvesting Pentagon spending](#) in human needs: “Today, we say to the military-industrial-complex that we will not continue to spend \$700 billion a year on the military — more than the next 10 nations combined,” the White House hopeful told the crowd. “We’re going to invest in affordable housing, we’re going to invest in public education, we’re going to invest in rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure — not more nuclear weapons and never-ending wars.”

- In 2001, after 9/11, [Sanders supported](#) a 50 percent cut for the Pentagon.
  - Sanders has been by far the candidate most willing to [actually vote against](#) Pentagon spending; he has only voted for 3 out of 19 [military spending bills](#) since 2013.
  - Sanders been willing to bend on military issues when they impact Vermont, drawing criticism for complaining about the high cost of the F-35 fighter jet while [supporting basing the F-35 in](#) his home state.
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## **Korean Peninsula**

- After the widely-panned Hanoi summit between Trump and Kim, [Sanders said](#): “Even though the Hanoi summit failed, the United States should continue diplomatic efforts with North Korea, and support the people of South Korea as they seek to end the conflict with the North.” Sanders has been one of the few democrats to keep advocating for diplomatic progress instead of just trying to score political points when Trump’s erratic approach to diplomacy inevitably stumbles.”
  - Sanders has echoed the peace communities call for a [lasting peace agreement](#) saying, “ A peace agreement is the best path for American security, and for the security of the region.”
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## **Israel/Palestine**

- In August, Sanders broached using US aid to Israel to push for better Israeli policies saying: “The United States government gives a whole lot of money to Israel, and I think we can leverage that money to end some of the racism that we have recently seen in Israel.”
- Despite being willing to take pro-peace stands on Israel Sanders calls himself a “defender of Israel.” He has strongly [opposed the BDS movement](#) (while opposing efforts to decriminalize it) and has said there is “absolutely” anti-semitism in the BDS movement. He

has signed on pro-Israeli government letters in Congress such [as a 2017 letter](#) to the UN secretary General accusing the UN of using its “privileged platform to advance an anti-Israel agenda”.

- Sanders has called Israel’s use of force in the 2014 war in Gaza “disproportionate” and “indiscriminate.”
- Speaking about the shootings of protesters in Gaza in 2018, Sanders said “Innocent people are being killed. Those are terrible actions. Instead of applauding Israel for its actions, Israel should be condemned.”
- Sanders has acknowledged that the U.S. is complicit with the occupation of the Palestinian territories, and that the U.S. is too quick to take the Israeli side, saying, “Certainly the United States is complicit, but it’s not to say ... that Israel is the only party at fault ... in terms of Israeli-Palestinian relations the United States has got to play a much more even-handed role. Clearly that is not the case right now.”
- Sanders coauthored a letter to Secretary of State Pompeo asking the U.S. to “do more to alleviate the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.” The letter calls for funds to rebuild Gaza, ease the blockade, and restore US funds to UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East).