

Sanders throws his support behind US propaganda campaign over Venezuela

By Genevieve Leigh
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Vermont Senator and Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders took to Twitter on Saturday to voice his support for the staged “humanitarian aid” provocation in Venezuela.

“The people of Venezuela are enduring a serious humanitarian crisis,” Sanders tweeted on Saturday. “The Maduro government must put the needs of its people first, allow humanitarian aid into the country, and refrain from violence against protesters.”

The tweet is in reference to this weekend’s attempt by the US to deliver “humanitarian aid” to Venezuela. Operating under the direction of the Trump administration, the right-wing Colombian and Brazilian governments attempted to move trucks into the country ostensibly carrying food and medical supplies. The US and its allies in the region used the occasion to stage orchestrated clashes between supporters of self-declared Venezuelan “interim president” Juan Guaidó and the Venezuelan government.

The incident is being used to whip up support for regime change and prepare a possible military intervention by the US on the part of Guaidó and his far-right Popular Will party.

Sanders’ tweet entirely accepts the “humanitarian” pretenses of the action carried out by the Trump administration against the Maduro government, which is seen as an obstacle to US domination of Venezuelan oil resources and overall domination of the continent. There is no reference to the fact that the “humanitarian crisis” to which Sanders refers has been severely compounded by US policies, including crippling economic sanctions, combined with the pro-capitalist policies of the Maduro regime.

As for “allowing humanitarian aid,” it is worth noting that the Red Cross opposed the US “aid” operation due to its transparently political purpose.

Sanders is quickly falling into line behind the Democratic Party, which backs the Trump administration operation in Venezuela. Sanders was criticized late last week after comments in an interview with Univision, in which he would not say that he recognized Guaidó as the legitimate president of the country. Asked whether he considered Maduro to be a dictator, Sanders refused to say yes or no.

Sanders’ earlier comments set off a flurry of denunciations from leading Democrats. Politico ran an article Thursday titled: “‘He is not going to be the nominee’: Dems slam Sanders over Maduro stance.” The article noted high profile Democrats such as Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and former Vice President Joe Biden, who have stated their support for Guaidó.

The *Washington Post* coverage quoted Christian Ulvert, a Florida Democratic strategist, saying, “They are clearly ignorant comments, and someone who’s running for president of the United States should be better briefed and knowledgeable about this crisis in Venezuela and how it impacts the Florida political landscape.”

Sanders’ tweet on Saturday was a message to the Democratic Party leadership that he will toe the line.

Following Sanders’ comments, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the New York congresswoman and member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), also weighed in, declaring in a video streamed on Twitter that “people want to make this about an ideology. Oh this is about socialism this is about capitalism this is about this that and the other. And what people don’t understand that this is really kind of an issue of authoritarianism versus democracy,” that is, that Maduro represents authoritarianism and Guaidó, “democracy.”

Going further to distance herself from socialism, she added, “People want to say my ideology is this my ideology is that, what I believe in above all else is a true democracy.”

Ocasio-Cortez is clearly taking her talking points from the same play book as Sanders. The Vermont Senator has a long history of framing foreign policy issues, to the extent they are addressed at all, around the struggle of “democracy versus authoritarianism,” in which the US ostensibly represents democracy, going as far back as his endorsement of the NATO war in the Balkans in the 1990s.

More recently, he has backed the US-orchestrated civil war in Syria, denouncing “Russian and Iranian support for Bashar al-Assad’s slaughter in Syria,” while criticizing the UN for being “too slow or unwilling to act.”

Sanders voted for the Authorization for Use of Military Force resolution in 2001, which was used as the basis for the invasion of Afghanistan and has since been cited as the legal basis for military attacks, drone assassinations, torture and other crimes overseas.

The uncritical acceptance of the propaganda campaign by Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez is not surprising. It flows from the character of Democratic Party politics and their own role in providing the right-wing Democratic Party with a pseudo-left veneer.

What makes these developments all the more significant is the political context in which they take place.

President Donald Trump has spent the last month launching a global crusade against socialism, which began at the State of the Union address in which he pledged to “renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country.” These denunciations came alongside appeals to nationalism and anti-immigrant racism.

Shortly following the State of the Union, the Trump administration declared a state of emergency in an attempt to usurp the prerogative of Congress to decide how public funds are to be spent to build his border wall. Then on February 18 in Miami, Trump doubled down on his anti-socialist crusade, delivering in a fascist speech, “The twilight of socialism has arrived in our hemisphere.”

Trump’s diatribes serve a dual purpose. They are directed at creating the framework for aggression

against the Venezuelan government, which is falsely identified as socialist, and subjugating all of Latin American to the dictates of US corporations. They are also directed at the working class in the US and creating the framework for mass repression at home. The Democratic Party’s response to Trump’s increasingly fascist tirades is to adapt to them.

The Democrats are gearing up for an extremely right-wing campaign in the 2020 election. Over the course of the past two years, the Democrats have concentrated their opposition to Trump on the anti-Russia campaign and the McCarthyite style #MeToo witch hunt.

Figures such as Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez play an important role. While occasionally spouting left and socialist phraseology, both have signed onto the right-wing policies and campaigns of the Democrats. Both have pledged their support for “border security.” Weeks after being elected, Ocasio-Cortez stood beside Bernie Sanders, nodding in agreement, as the Vermont senator endorsed the Democrats’ anti-Russia campaign.

A few weeks later, Ocasio-Cortez joined Sanders in the chorus of praise for Senator John McCain, utilizing the death of McCain as an opportunity to shift public opinion in favor of war and political reaction.

Now, both Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez are lending their support to the operation in Venezuela.

All this is proof once again that there can be no struggle against war except in the fight against capitalism, and there can be no fight against capitalism without a fight against war. In the case of Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez and all the organizations that promote them—they oppose neither war nor capitalism.

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