

BERNIE SANDERS



OVERVIEW

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders stands out from the pack in his consistent progressivism and structural critique of the US's foreign policy failures. He's a leader on many issues, from working to end the war in Yemen, to prioritizing climate change as the greatest threat to global security and prosperity. Since his welcome shift from the status quo faces entrenched opposition, we want him to be more specific in many of his plans, to show how he would implement the vision he clearly articulates, and to devote more attention to explaining his preferred budget and size of the Defense Department, State Department, and other foreign policy agencies.

The United States's Role in the World

What we're looking for: A progressive foreign policy rejects Trump-esque “America First” posturing in which alliances are annoyances, international institutions are burdens, and foreign policy is inherently zero-sum, oppositional, and transactional. A progressive foreign policy also avoids “American exceptionalism” framing, which fails to recognize the harm that some of the United States’s policies have done in the world (including policies instituted before Trump), and it does not view either the US’s permanent, global military hegemony as a prerequisite for a peaceful world, or the rise of other countries as an inherent threat.

Where Sanders stands: Sanders has called for a foreign policy based on “partnership, not dominance.”¹ He has explicitly renounced the nationalism of “America First” ideology,² stressing the necessity of multilateral cooperation and investing in international institutions.³ While embracing the potential for international engagement to securing a safer future, Sanders does not hesitate to indict US policies that have resulted in harm, moral compromise, and instability.⁴

He explicitly disavows the idea of an inherently benevolent global hegemon, and extends to his foreign policy his demand for greater democracy and empowerment of working-class people and his campaign against inequality and unaccountable elites.⁵ In a speech in 2017, Sanders said that “the United States must seek partnerships not just between governments, but between peoples.”⁶

Sanders does not pretend that reinventing the global power structure is simply a matter of changes by the US. He warns of a “new authoritarian axis” consisting of strong-man rulers like Viktor Orbán of Hungary, Vladimir Putin of Russia, Recep Erdoğan

of Turkey, Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, and Kim Jong-un of North Korea, who share the approach of “hostility toward democratic norms, antagonism toward a free press, intolerance toward ethnic and religious minorities, and a belief that government should benefit their own selfish financial interests.”⁷ In this respect, Sanders makes the important point that Donald Trump is not an anomaly but represents a rising tide of authoritarian, xenophobic, kleptocratic nationalism that is gaining traction across the globe—a rise which few of his fellow candidates can otherwise explain. Sanders sees this problem as one that must be tackled globally, in large part by addressing the root conditions that have given rise to these demagogues.

Sanders points out that “competitors like China and Russia have exploited our forever wars to expand their economic and political influence around the world,” and that Chinese President Xi Jinping “has steadily consolidated power, clamping down on domestic political freedom while aggressively promoting its version of authoritarian capitalism abroad.”⁸

Furthermore, he clearly identifies that the failings of the past have directly given rise to this authoritarian movement, and that merely returning to the pre-Trump status quo will not be sufficient to reverse the tide. To Sanders, the US approach to foreign policy has harmed our ability to meet these challenges because we have squandered our resources, invested in the wrong tools, and chosen alliances that have morally compromised our credibility.

Sanders wrote, “In order to effectively combat the rise of the international authoritarian axis, we need an international progressive movement that mobilizes behind a vision of shared prosperity, security and dignity for all people, and that addresses the massive global inequality that exists, not only in wealth but in political power.”⁹

He concludes that “such a movement must be willing to think creatively and boldly about the world that we would like to see. While the authoritarian axis is committed to tearing down a post-second world war

global order that they see as limiting their access to power and wealth, it is not enough for us to simply defend that order as it exists now.”¹⁰

Bottom line: Sanders is not the isolationist that he is often smeared as. He embraces global engagement and advocates strongly for multilateral cooperation, but he is also willing to directly acknowledge and warn against both the harm that has been caused by US policies and the international institutions the US dominates, and the role that global wealth and power inequality has played in allowing authoritarian nationalism to rise. His vision of America’s role in the world is as a leader, not one of dominance, transactionalism, and coercion.

Threat Assessments

What we’re looking for: We want to see candidates take stock of and prioritize the security challenges facing the United States through a realistic lens that avoids fearmongering and/or inflating the level of actual threat. Candidates should prioritize by looking at physical, social, and economic threats holistically, and put people over power and profits. We want to see a recognition that many security challenges lack military solutions, and an acknowledgement that there are limits to US power.

Where Sanders stands: Sanders’s campaign website identifies “climate change, militarism, authoritarianism, and global inequality” as our top national security challenges; it also observes that around the world “democracy is under threat by forces of intolerance, corruption, and authoritarianism.”¹¹ For years, Sanders has consistently identified climate change as the paramount threat to global stability,¹² placing it well above transnational groups that perpetrate terrorism.¹³

More recently, Sanders has said that the greatest threat to America’s security comes from our own political dysfunction and the neglect of our citizens’

economic security.¹⁴ He has condemned the post-9/11 war paradigm as a misguided failure.¹⁵

Though Sanders wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that “terrorism is a very real threat, which requires robust diplomatic efforts, intelligence cooperation with allies and partners, and yes, sometimes military action,” he also noted that, “as an organizing framework, the global war on terror has been a disaster for our country. Orienting U.S. national-security strategy around terrorism essentially allowed a few thousand violent extremists to dictate the foreign policy of the most powerful nation on earth. We responded to terrorists by giving them exactly what they wanted.”¹⁶

Bottom line: Sanders does an excellent job prioritizing threats, consistently identifying political, economic, and environmental challenges as the greatest security threats to the US. He has rejected the fearmongering rhetoric of the post-9/11 wars that’s been used to justify disastrous interventions in numerous countries and lopsided federal spending. He also has called out the broken assumptions behind the militarization of US foreign policy. Sanders should go further in identifying what tools the US government needs to develop and/or invest in to address these challenges and make his vision a reality.

Investing in Military Dominance versus Other Tools

What we’re looking for: The challenges facing the United States often lack military solutions, and prioritizing global military dominance at any cost is both harmful and unsustainable. A progressive budget would instead prioritize increasing the number of expert diplomats, expanding development

programs that prevent conflict and reduce poverty, and fortifying peacebuilding institutions, rather than further inflating the already bloated Pentagon budget.

Where Sanders stands: In November 2019, Sanders said, “America’s greatness stems from more than just its military budget.”¹⁷ Indeed, he frequently decries the high levels of Pentagon spending, often contrasting it with cuts in domestic priorities like healthcare and education.¹⁸ In a major foreign policy speech in 2017, Sanders said, “Foreign policy is about US government budget priorities. At a time when we already spend more on defense than the next twelve nations combined, foreign policy is about authorizing a defense budget of some \$700 billion, including a \$50 billion increase passed just last week.”

He has consistently voted against recent authorization and appropriations bills to increase the military budget.¹⁹ In his inaugural speech on the 2020 campaign trail, he emphasized his support for reallocating bloated Pentagon funds to domestic needs.²⁰ Specifically, he’s called for cutting Pentagon spending as part of the Green New Deal.²¹

Sanders has been vocal in condemning how “the war on terror has also been staggeringly wasteful... And even after this enormous expense, the world has more terrorists now, not fewer.”²² However, it is not clear what levels of Pentagon spending Sanders would view as appropriate, if elected president, other than that he views current levels as too high.

In June 2019, Sanders wrote, “[W]e must seriously reinvest in diplomacy and development aid, both of which have been allowed to atrophy under the current administration. Addressing issues like civil and religious tension, corruption, and lack of opportunity before these conditions give rise to conflict can eliminate the need to address them militarily in the future.”²³ However, Sanders has not unveiled a specific plan to rebuild the State Department and other peacebuilding tools, if elected. He also hasn’t clarified what new investments or restructuring he would make to the agencies that would be under his control, if elected.

Bottom line: Sanders is a reliable supporter of decreasing America’s bloated, wasteful, and unstrategic Pentagon budget, and he has explicitly advocated for reinvesting the money in other priorities, such as diplomacy, domestic prosperity, and protecting against the climate crisis. We want him to be specific, however, about the levels of funding he thinks align with his vision for the US role in the world, and how he would fortify other foreign policy tools to achieve the objectives he’s proposed.

The Crisis in Yemen, and US Military Support to the Gulf States

What we’re looking for: A progressive consensus has emerged in favor of ending US military support for a bombing campaign as part of Yemen’s civil war. During the Obama administration, the US began to actively assist a coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, supplying them with intelligence, targeting assistance, refueling aircraft, and weapons sales.

All parties to this conflict, including the Saudi-led coalition as well as their enemies the Houthis, have committed war crimes against the civilian population. But US military support for the Saudis makes the United States directly complicit in their actions targeting civilians and blockading key ports, resulting in a mass famine, a spiraling civilian body count, a cholera outbreak, and currently the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. Congress has voted on a bipartisan basis to end US participation in Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen, and to halt arms sales to the Gulf states carrying out the atrocities. President Trump, however, has vetoed these efforts. At minimum, a progressive candidate would commit to end US complicity in this tragedy and similar atrocities in the future.

Where Sanders stands: Sanders is one of the most prominent leaders on the issue of ending US military support to Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen. He led a resolution to do just that, and it passed out of Congress despite both a Republican majority in the Senate and reluctant support from some of House Democratic leadership.²⁴ While many of his colleagues openly criticized the US’s relationship with the Saudi regime only *after* the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Sanders has for many years vocally opposed the US’s blank check for what is currently the world’s largest humanitarian disaster.²⁵

Sanders also supports an end to US arms sales to Saudi Arabia based on their human rights abuses,²⁶ and has called for a changed relationship with the autocratic Saudi ruling family in Riyadh, but he says it’s a “hard reality” that we still must sometimes partner with undemocratic governments for our own security.²⁷ He has proposed a diplomatic solution to negotiate a peaceful end to the conflict in Yemen.

Bottom line: Sanders is the unequivocal leader in the 2020 field on the issue of the war in Yemen, and his senatorial work on the matter can be credited with helping to bring the issue to public light. We’d love to see him go further and support ending arms sales to all countries committing these kinds of extreme abuses of human rights.

Ending Endless Wars

What we’re looking for: The post-9/11 wars and global military operations have proven ineffective at reducing terrorism. They also seem to be endless, consuming trillions of dollars and tens of thousands of lives. A progressive candidate should explicitly recognize that there is no military solution to transnational groups that perpetuate terrorism, and should reflect the overwhelming consensus among the US public that these wars were a mistake.

Candidates should articulate clear, thoughtful plans for bringing the “Forever War” to an end. These plans should encompass not only ending US military interventions in places like Afghanistan and Syria but also halting the routine use of targeted strikes through drones and raids, and arming and training of proxy forces. Their plans should drastically limit the widespread covert operations of US special forces, and not simply replace active military operations with less-transparent covert operations or with private-sector mercenaries.

Their plans should invest heavily in ensuring a stable and peaceful transition as those operations wind down, placing impacted civilian populations as a top priority through inclusive diplomatic negotiations and aid programs.

Candidates should also focus on fortifying the constitutionally mandated separation of war powers between the Executive Branch and Congress. Candidates should also work to increase transparency and democratic accountability over the future use of the US military.

Where Sanders stands: Sanders was the first 2020 candidate to sign progressive veterans group Common Defense’s pledge to end the forever war.²⁸ He’s pledged to withdraw combat troops from Afghanistan by the end of his first term,²⁹ and to implement harm-reducing diplomatic and humanitarian policies.³⁰ He also voted against authorizing the disastrous Iraq War.³¹ Additionally, Sanders has articulated presidential war powers in narrow self-defense terms, insisting that Congress should be the body to authorize military force.³²

It should be noted, however, that like every member of Congress except Representative Barbara Lee, Sanders voted in favor of the original endless war authorization in 2001, which he has since worked to repeal.³³ He also hasn’t explicitly ruled out leaving residual forces in Afghanistan,³⁴ nor has he pledged to wind down drone strikes or widespread deployments of special forces as part of a holistic plan for ending the endless war.³⁵

He has said there may be instances in which drone strikes are appropriate, but he opposes their use by the CIA, and has urged increased transparency of the legal basis.³⁶

Bottom line: Sanders has been a firm advocate of democratizing war powers and ending the endless “War on Terror” paradigm. Even better would be his acknowledgment that this must necessarily include an end to targeted strikes and other widespread small-scale combat operations around the world, and articulating a plan to do so.

Russia and China

What we’re looking for: Progressive candidates should reject the framing that the rise of Russia and China requires a response akin to a new Cold War, a ramped-up “great-power competition” for unquestioned global military dominance at any cost, or a zero-sum diplomatic approach hostile to targeted cooperation with either state. Human rights abuses and other violations of international norms should not be ignored, but we’d like to see candidates recognize that there is no military solution to these challenges.

Instead, progressive candidates should offer solutions such as diplomatic cooperation to create pressure and incentives through multilateral mechanisms. Candidates’ proposed solutions should primarily focus on domestic investments and on opportunities for transnational partnership in order to jointly address existential, shared global challenges (climate change, nuclear weapons).

Progressive candidates should also recognize that the challenges that Russia and China pose are unique and context specific. In the case of Russia, the primary security challenge to the US consists of disinformation and election interference, like what took place in 2016, as well as the country’s willingness to wage asymmetric warfare, such as in Crimea. In the case of China, the primary security challenge is the

increasingly totalitarian nature of the regime and its willingness to weaponize technology and economic resources to the detriment of human rights and human dignity, both inside and beyond its borders.

Where Sanders stands: Sanders has emphasized the need to engage with Russia and China on climate change.³⁷ He’s spoken out against concerning behaviors and human rights abuses by both countries, and he appears to prefer working multilaterally to address them. While he has indicated his support of NATO troop buildup in Europe to counter Russia,³⁸ and while he talks about escalating pressure to counter its aggression,³⁹ he has also warned against a new military conflict.⁴⁰ He raised eyebrows by praising China’s efforts to eradicate poverty,⁴¹ but he has also spoken out sharply against its human rights record⁴² and fit both Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping into what he perceives as the global rising force of authoritarianism, which he says requires a transnational progressive movement and international diplomacy to confront.⁴³

In June 2019, Sanders said, “[C]ompetitors like China and Russia have exploited our forever wars to expand their economic and political influence around the world,” adding that Chinese President Xi Jinping “has steadily consolidated power, clamping down on domestic political freedom while aggressively promoting its version of authoritarian capitalism abroad.”⁴⁴

Bottom line: Sanders clearly views China and Russia’s role in climate change and rising political authoritarianism—rather than hypothetical military confrontation—as the primary threat to national and international security. He also appears to view the Chinese and Russian regimes as threats to the cause of democracy itself, but he does not echo Cold War–esque rhetoric or proposals; instead, he focuses on empowering social movements to combat this

challenge. We'd like to hear more on how he views the tension between confronting authoritarianism and collaborating with authoritarian regimes.

Venezuela

What we're looking for: Mindful both of the crisis unfolding in Venezuela as well as the ugly history of US interventions in Latin America, progressives are looking to presidential candidates to first do no harm. This means recognizing that US options in Venezuela are not "war or nothing," that a US military intervention will only make things worse, that broad-based sanctions harm the most vulnerable while empowering the Maduro regime, and that there are numerous steps that the US can and should take to help Venezuelans. Most importantly, it means recognizing that the only viable path out of the current crisis is a negotiated process that leads to free and fair elections, allowing Venezuelans themselves to choose their own leaders.

Where Sanders stands: Sanders broke with leaders from both parties in refraining from praising the Trump administration's approach to Venezuela.⁴⁵ He has also joined with the rest of the field in denouncing Maduro's authoritarianism, calling him a "vicious tyrant,"⁴⁶ and recognizes that the May 2018 vote on which Maduro bases his mandate was "undemocratic."⁴⁷ Sanders supports an emphasis on new elections, 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."⁴⁸

At the same time, Sanders has remained steadfastly opposed to US military intervention to depose the Maduro regime,⁴⁹ rightly pointing to the cautionary tale of disastrous prior US interventions in the region.⁵⁰ He's also warned against further "broad sanctions" that harm the people and not the government,⁵¹ and has endorsed Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelans in the United States.⁵²

Bottom line: Sanders' clear linkage of his anti-military intervention position in Venezuela with the harm that the US has previously done in Latin America makes him stand out on this issue. It is good to see his insistence on credible, free, and fair elections as the best solution to the Venezuela crisis.

North Korea

What we're looking for: Democrats often fail to express a principled, progressive plan for diplomacy with North Korea. Candidates should reject framing that diplomacy is a gift or a concession to North Korea, should recognize how dangerous a military clash would be, and should commit not to strike North Korea first but instead to embrace a sustained, long-term path of diplomacy and peace, including by formally ending the Korean War.

Where Sanders stands: While many other Democratic contenders for the nomination have reflexively opposed every attempt by the Trump administration to normalize US–North Korea diplomatic relations, Sanders has gone on the record indicating support for the talks between Kim Jong-un and Trump.⁵³ Rather than painting talks with Pyongyang as inherently a concession to Kim, he has argued that the 2018 Singapore Summit, while "light in substance," served as a solid first step to normalizing relations.⁵⁴ He has advocated for a step-by-step approach of peace and diplomacy,⁵⁵ cosponsored legislation to prevent a preemptive war with North Korea,⁵⁶ and used his platform to speak out about the unresolved status of the Korean War.⁵⁷

Bottom line: Sanders has taken a principled position on the crisis on the Korean peninsula, condemning the brutality of the North Korean regime and expressing skepticism about the substance of the Kim–Trump talks while also recognizing the importance of sustained diplomacy and a peace agreement instead of leaning on "concession" rhetoric.

Iran

What we're looking for: At minimum, we want to see candidates commit both to reentering the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) negotiated by President Obama, which Donald Trump violated, and to declare that they will not start a war with Iran. Furthermore, candidates should not repeat right-wing talking points that criticize the JCPOA deal as “flawed,” or inaccurately assert that Iran “has” or is “actively developing” nuclear weapons. Progressive candidates will realistically assess the challenges posed by Iran, and recognize that only diplomacy can succeed in addressing those challenges, with the JCPOA representing a successful model of international cooperation.

Where Sanders stands: Sanders has been outspoken in support of the JCPOA⁵⁸ and has pledged to have the US rejoin the agreement, if elected.⁵⁹ Sanders has forcefully and correctly pointed out the massive destruction a potential military conflict with Tehran would entail,⁶⁰ and said that such a conflict would be far more destructive than the Iraq War. Sanders demonstrated his seriousness on the issue of diplomacy with Iran by being the lone Democratic vote against 2017 sanctions on Russia,⁶¹ which were packaged with Iran sanctions that he said would serve to further deteriorate US–Iran talks and would undermine the JCPOA deal.

Bottom line: Sanders is a firm and reliable supporter of both the JCPOA and preventing a new war with Iran, and he doesn't echo the false narrative that Iran is the most (or only) destabilizing actor in the region.

Corruption and the Military-Industrial Complex

What we're looking for: Progressives recognize that the military-industrial complex, like any other sector of entrenched corporate power, has an undue influence in our politics, our foreign policy, and our framework of national security decision-making. Candidates should recognize this as well, and articulate specific reforms to combat corruption, revolving doors, lobbying influence, corporate welfare, and be willing to take on the power of the defense industry in the same way they'd take on sectors like Wall Street.

Where Sanders stands: During his calls to shrink the Pentagon budget, Sanders has explicitly named the military-industrial complex as an antagonist,⁶² and has spoken out against the “excessive compensation” of defense-industry contractors as contributing to fraud in the industry.⁶³

However, he has not proposed a specific plan to tackle corruption in the defense industry, revolving doors with the Pentagon and Congress, or the influence these massive corporations hold in local economies. Indeed, he has fought to keep the controversial and wildly expensive F-35 weapons system afloat, a system that is partially based in his state.⁶⁴

Bottom line: Sanders recognizes the malignant nature of the military-industrial complex and the need to rein in excessive profits of defense contractors, but his support for defense-related jobs in his own state underscores even further the need for the next president to enact a robust, comprehensive plan to transition the US economy away from reliance on wasteful Pentagon spending, weapons manufacturing, and fossil fuels, in order to truly address the military-industrial complex.

Nuclear Weapons

What we're looking for: Progressive candidates should enthusiastically support US participation in key arms-control agreements, including extending the New START treaty and reentering the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. They should also embrace a “No First Use” policy, meaning they’ll commit to use nuclear weapons only to deter nuclear attacks on the US or its allies. They should also support reducing the role of nuclear weapons in US foreign policy, and reject the development of new nuclear weapons.

Where Sanders stands: Earlier in his congressional career, Sanders introduced legislation to terminate the nuclear weapons program altogether.⁶⁵ During his first term in the Senate, Sanders voted to ratify the New START treaty,⁶⁶ and today he supports its extension.⁶⁷ In response to Trump’s decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty, Sanders became an inaugural cosponsor of the Prevention of Arms Race Act of 2019.⁶⁸ He has endorsed a “No First Use” policy, cosponsoring the bill led by Senator Elizabeth Warren,⁶⁹ and he has opposed the production of new nuclear weapons.⁷⁰

Bottom line: Sanders has a consistent record on nuclear weapons, with strong support for reducing or eliminating these weapons programs and preventing proliferation

The Muslim Ban, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers

What we're looking for: It should be a top priority for a progressive president to repeal Trump’s Muslim, asylum, and refugee bans—but that’s not enough. A progressive president should live up to America’s aspirational values and undo nearly a century of xenophobic policies by moving to increase

refugee resettlements (particularly among refugee populations directly created by US policy), support reforms that significantly streamline the asylum process, ensure there are no such similar bans in the future, and make direct connections to the US policy decisions framed around “national security” that have systematically demonized Muslims and people of color as inherently suspect and threatening.

Progressive candidates should call out Trump and the Republican Party’s racist “divide-and-conquer” tactics that falsely paint immigrants and refugees as the reason for voters’ problems, in order to distract from the real causes. The candidate should recognize that US foreign policy is deeply intertwined with US immigration policy, and work to make the US a more welcoming nation while also working to create a more peaceful, stable world where fewer people are forced to flee their homes.

Where Sanders stands: Sanders is a cosponsor of legislation to undo Trump’s Muslim ban and prevent future similar bans.⁷¹

Sanders appears to believe that the US should accept at least 100,000 refugees annually, though the exact number he proposes is unclear.⁷² He supports the introduction of legal protection for climate refugees.⁷³ He also supports aid to the Northern Triangle to address reasons that people flee, though has not proposed a specific amount.⁷⁴

Even better, he’s coupled these proposals with insistence that US foreign policy stop exacerbating the root causes of the migration crisis.⁷⁵ This is something he’s been consistent on, since he has long been an opponent of disastrous US interventions and meddling in Latin America, along with other policies that have contributed to the present instability and migration crisis.⁷⁶

Bottom line: Though his proposals don’t have the specificity of other 2020 contenders’, Sanders uniquely takes every opportunity to explain positions on modern issues within the context of US foreign policies that helped us get here.

Civil Liberties and Human Rights in National Security Policy

What we're looking for: The US's approach to national security following 9/11 has produced numerous human rights and civil liberties abuses, from torture and surveillance to racial profiling and indefinite detention. Progressive candidates should propose specific reforms to end these abuses, and roll back infringements on rights in the name of security, particularly those disproportionately impacting marginalized communities.

Where Sanders stands: Sanders has consistently opposed indefinite detention, trials of detainees by military commission, and the existence of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp,⁷⁷ though he does not appear to have proposed a specific plan to reverse these practices if elected. He has affirmed the ban on torture⁷⁸ and voted for legislation to codify it.⁷⁹ In 2001, as a member of the House of Representatives, Sanders voted against the Patriot Act,⁸⁰ and later, as a member of the Senate, he voted against its extension in 2011.⁸¹ Additionally, he's spoken in favor of ending current NSA surveillance activities,⁸² and voted against expanded surveillance authorities.⁸³

Bottom line: Sanders has staked out a strong progressive position on civil liberties in national security, though he has not unveiled specific plans to fully implement his vision.

Climate Security

What we're looking for: Progressives recognize climate change as an existential national security threat, and want candidates to articulate a plan to confront this threat with the scope and urgency that it requires. This is particularly important because

the US, and in particular the US military, makes a disproportionately large contribution to carbon emissions.

There is a direct line from the effects of climate change—droughts, crop failures, land loss, desertification, animal extinctions, and increasingly frequent severe weather and natural disasters—to a growing amount of unrest and instability around the world. These disruptions have already led to violent conflict, and unrest will continue to get worse. Climate refugees will be forced to seek new homes, resulting in unprecedented levels of migration. Melting arctic ice has exposed previously buried natural resources, setting off competition among different nations to secure them—a competition that could easily escalate into war. Up to this point, the US has responded to the spiraling level of conflict and instability by fortifying and militarizing its borders, growing its armed forces, and intervening in fragile countries around the world while investing trillions of taxpayer dollars into the increasingly difficult task of maintaining global military dominance.

A progressive candidate should recognize that climate change is both the greatest threat to the safety and prosperity of the US, and the global issue that the US has the greatest power to mitigate. A progressive candidate should recognize that the growing militarization of our society has things exactly backward: It's a fruitless effort to adapt to the symptoms, instead of treating the rapidly worsening disease.

A progressive candidate should have a serious and detailed plan to prevent further climate change. This should include not only a domestic plan but also a framework for a global Green New Deal, reentering and significantly building upon the Paris Agreement, supporting the UN Green Climate Fund, and recognizing the crucial impact that the current size, structure, and role of the US military has in fueling the climate crisis.⁸⁴

Where Sanders stands: Sanders boasts one of the most-comprehensive records on climate change in

the Democratic field. For years, he has identified climate change as the most pressing national security threat,⁸⁵ long before it became common to identify it as such. Sanders was an original co-sponsor of the Ocasio-Cortez–Markey Green New Deal proposal, and he included in his variant of plan a proposed reduction in military spending, though he did not a specific figure.⁸⁶ He has condemned Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement.⁸⁷ In addition to rejoining Paris, he’s proposed a sweeping environmental program that includes the declaration

of climate change as a national emergency and the allocation of \$200 billion to the UN Green Climate Fund, which helps developing countries to cut carbon emissions.⁸⁸

Bottom line: Among his competitors in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary, Sanders takes a notably strong stance on climate policy. He has a history of leading the conversation in framing the climate crisis as an imminent national security concern, which warrants prioritization and international cooperation.

ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/9/21/16345600/bernie-sanders-full-text-transcript-foreign-policy-speech-westminster>
2. <https://twitter.com/sensanders/status/871735736386670593?lang=en>
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4. For example, Sanders has connected the rise of ISIS to the power vacuum created by the disastrous U.S.-led invasion of Iraq: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/bernie-sanders-pins-the-rise-of-isis-on-disastrous-invasion-of-iraq_n_5b57f40fe4b0890b5c5e5e85
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