

Liberals Love Trump—When He Embraces Military Intervention

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It is no secret that Democratic Party leaders and their ideological allies in the media loathe Donald Trump, some even stating explicitly that he is “unfit” to be president. Allegations include that he is a racist who excuses the behavior of white nationalists, that he harbors dictatorial impulses, and that he and his campaign organization collaborated with the Russian government to steal the 2016 presidential election. Progressives have almost nothing good to say about the man or his policies—with one very big exception. When he embraces the kind of military interventions that typified previous administrations, even outspoken figures on the left tend to mute their hostility and praise Trump for being “presidential.” That belligerent foreign-policy initiatives are the one thing that warms liberal hearts says volumes about the sorry state of the current political left regarding issues of war and peace.

Progressives were especially enthusiastic about two Trump administration actions: the cruise-missile strikes against Syria in response to the Assad regime’s alleged use of chemical weapons, and the president’s decision to continue and intensify the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan. Some of the compliments admittedly had a backhanded quality about them. *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof stated that “President Trump’s attack on Syria was of “dubious legality,” as well as being both “hypocritical” and “impulsive.” Nevertheless, he concluded that Trump “was right” to order the strikes. Former Representative Jane Harman (D-Calif.) admonished her fellow liberals: “We have to depersonalize this. Some people don’t like Trump, so they’re upset that he did this.” But “if a policy is right, congratulate those who are carrying it out.”

Others were less restrained in their support of Trump’s hawkishness. John Kerry stated that he was “absolutely supportive” of the Syria raid. *Daily Beast* columnist Matt Lewis nearly gushed with enthusiasm following that coercive action. “This seemed like a very different Donald Trump. More serious—and clearly moved emotionally.” Fareed Zakaria, the host of CNN’s program “Global Public Square,” concluded that “President Trump recognized that the President of the United States does have to act to enforce international norms, does have to have this broader moral and political purpose....I think there has been an interesting morphing and education of Donald Trump.” Indeed, he “became President of the United States last night.”

Left-of-center endorsements of the president’s decision to continue the 16-year-old mission in Afghanistan seemed even more widespread and supportive. CNN White House correspondent Maggie Haberman underscored Trump’s comment in his television address to the nation that “we are not nation-building again. We are killing terrorists.” She concluded not only that it was “one

of his more forceful, best lines of [the] address,” but that Trump “gave his best speech as POTUS.” In an echo of the thesis Zakaria expressed following the Syria episode that Trump had grown in office, *Daily Beast* correspondent Sam Stein coauthored an [article](#) observing that “in a rare bit of self-reflection, Trump explained that the reason he changed his tune on Afghanistan was precisely because of the weight of his office.”

The receptivity of liberals to Trump’s hawkish moments reflects a deeper problem with the political left that has been building for years. Long gone are the days during the Vietnam War when liberals were much more inclined than conservatives to oppose military adventurism. Support for George W. Bush’s war in Iraq was truly bipartisan, with an abundant number of Democrats crossing the aisle and voting for the resolution approving that mission. Indeed, during the previous decade, liberals were among the most enthusiastic proponents of the Clinton administration’s “humanitarian” wars in Bosnia and Kosovo.

When Barack Obama escalated the U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan and orchestrated a NATO assault to remove Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi from power, the criticism was sparse. Except for a few hard-left organizations, such as Code Pink, the sounds coming from the usual supposed anti-war liberal quarters were those of crickets. Likewise, with the exception of a few principled progressive Democrats like Representative Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii), there was little push-back to Obama’s gradual restoration of a U.S. military presence in Iraq or his military meddling in Syria.

Even the much-touted Bernie Sanders failed to live up to hopes that he would embrace a consistent anti-war position. Foreign policy in general, and opposition to Washington’s elective wars in particular, became a secondary and anemic theme in his campaign against Hillary Clinton. His milquetoast behavior has become more pronounced since then. Just days after Donald Trump’s upset victory, Sanders penned a [high-profile article](#) in the *New York Times* outlining the policy agenda for progressives going forward. The piece contained the usual laundry list of identity politics and spending proposals that left-wing types have been pushing for decades. What was striking, though, is that the article contained not a word—*not a single word*—about the need for a more restrained, peaceful foreign policy.

In fairness, Sanders has recently taken a hard line against Washington’s [backing](#) of Saudi Arabia—especially Riyadh’s atrocity-filled war of aggression in Yemen. Nevertheless, there are few signs that he has emerged as an outspoken, reliable opponent of U.S. foreign policy militarism. His track record, including his [support](#) for Bill Clinton’s “humanitarian” wars in the Balkans, suggests that he will be, at best, an inconsistent critic of Washington’s adventurism.

Many of today’s progressives, though, are far worse. They seem nearly as susceptible to blood lust as the most hawkish neoconservatives. Consider the [comments](#) of MSNBC host (and former anchor of the Nightly News on the main NBC network) Brian Williams in response to the missile strikes on Syria. “We see these beautiful pictures at night from the decks of these two U.S. Navy vessels in the eastern Mediterranean....I am tempted to quote the great Leonard Cohen: ‘I am guided by the beauty of our weapons.’” Given that kind of sick militaristic enthusiasm, it is no wonder that liberals have found their one reason to like Donald Trump.

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