

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

## **Bernie Sanders's Frustration—And Ours**

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There were a few moments during the most recent Democratic debate when Bernie Sanders let fly his frustration with the bipartisan consensus that drives U.S. foreign policy. As we head into the early caucuses and primaries, watch to see how candidates on both sides -- Republicans and Democrats -- approach the crux of Sanders's complaint.

"The United States of America cannot succeed, or be thought of as the policeman of the world," the senator from Vermont explained.

He lamented:

that when there's an international crisis all over the world, ... hey, just call up the American military and the American taxpayers, they're going to send the troops.

And if they have to be in the Middle East for 20 or 30 years no problem.

[...]

I believe that countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar have got to step up to the plate, have got to contribute the money that we need, and the troops that we need, to destroy ISIS with American support.

When moderator Martha Raddatz countered that the Obama "administration has tried that over and over again," and asked "what's your plan B?" Sanders rejected the premise of her question.

"My plan is to make it work," he explained, implying that the Obama administration had not made a serious effort to shift the burden to others. He said, to much applause, that he would:

tell Saudi Arabia that instead of going to war in Yemen, they, one of the wealthiest countries on Earth, are going to have to go to war against ISIS [and] tell Qatar, that instead of spending \$200 billion on the World Cup, maybe they should pay attention to ISIS, which is at their doorstep.

This is one area where Sanders can differentiate himself from Hillary Clinton. She has moved in his direction on domestic policy, but she remains a leading advocate for the view that America can and must be the world's policeman. Her responses in the debate sounded suspiciously like those in the Republican ones. Judging from the audience reaction, there is considerable sympathy for Sanders's perspective.

We shouldn't, however, hold our breath that a strategic shift is in the offing. The Saudis, Qataris, and others in the region (like much of the world) are unlikely to change course and take responsibility for their security, because they believe that Uncle Sam will keep doing it for them. They know that Bernie Sanders won't be elected president of the United States. And they have good reason to doubt that any other serious critics of U.S. foreign policy will be either.

This is true despite the fact that Americans strongly resist Washington's impulse to solve all the world's problems. In the most recent survey by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, just 38 percent of Americans agreed that "Defending our allies' security" should be a very important foreign policy goal for the United States. ([pdf](#), See [Appendix, Figure 2](#)). The two major parties are almost certain to produce nominees who believe that it should be. The leading Democrats and Republicans disagree on a number of issues, but not on the key tenets of U.S. foreign policy.

Sen. Sanders's frustration with this state of affairs is real, but so is the danger that the foreign policy status quo is producing the worst possible outcome: a deepening set of security challenges, too few international players willing or able to address them, and a growing gap between the American people and the elites who profess to serve them. This creates a single point of failure in the international system -- the United States. If Americans fail to act in *any* part of the world, for whatever reason, other countries that are in a better position to address proximate challenges are effectively paralyzed. Problems that might have been contained at a local or regional level only fester and grow.

There are viable alternatives out there, but we need a serious discussion of these alternatives in order to bring them before the American people. Bernie Sanders isn't enough.

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