



# WTH is going on with Bernie Sanders? What having a democratic socialist as president would mean for American leadership abroad

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Danielle Pletka: Hi, I'm Danielle Pletka.

Marc Thiessen: I'm Marc Thiessen.

Danielle Pletka: Welcome to our podcast, "What the Hell Is Going On."

Danielle Pletka: Marc what the hell is going on?

Marc Thiessen: Well, what the hell is going on is, we're going to be talking about Bernie Sanders' foreign policy, but before that, a word from our sponsors.

Danielle Pletka: Wait, that's you, right? Our sponsor is you.

Marc Thiessen: We have no sponsors.

Danielle Pletka: Okay, so you.

Marc Thiessen: Yeah, so me. So, we're new at this podcasting thing, and I've been told that we should be asking you to subscribe. So if you've been listening to the podcast, you like our guests, you like this discussion, take a moment right now to just...

Danielle Pletka: And you love me, and don't love Marc, or vice versa.

Marc Thiessen: Or vice versa. Absolutely. This is the small segment audience.

Marc Thiessen: Anyway, if you like either one of us, or even if you hate us, but like hating us and listen to the podcast because you hate us, whatever your reason, we ask you to go online right now, wherever you listen to your podcasts, and hit subscribe. And even rate us. But only rate us if you like us.

Danielle Pletka: That's a good point.

Marc Thiessen: Excellent.

Danielle Pletka: All right, so Bernie Sanders' foreign policy.

- Marc Thiessen: Yes.
- Danielle Pletka: Yeah, you know something, it's a complete throwback for me to talk about Bernie Sanders' foreign policy, it reminds me of being in grad school and talking about the foreign policy of the Soviet Union.
- Marc Thiessen: You know, our friend Eli Lake had a great tweet today, he said, "Stop the propaganda, he's not a commie. He's a Democratic Communist."
- Danielle Pletka: Of course. Because of course folks, you understand, Bernie Sanders is not a Democrat. And this is not me being silly. Bernie Sanders is a democratic socialist.
- Marc Thiessen: Which is like, every socialist regime throughout history... North Korea is the Democratic People's Republic. Every socialist regime always puts "democratic" before it, it's like a way to soften the hard edges.
- Danielle Pletka: So, one of the things that is amazing to me is that a socialist, let's forget his foreign policy—even though we're here to talk about that today—that a socialist is actually someone who is seriously in the running. I saw the polls that came out this week. Bernie Sanders has moved to a double digit national lead over his Democratic opponents, his primary opponents. What the hell?
- Marc Thiessen: The other thing is that we're living in an age right now, and I want to do an episode about this at some point with some really interesting experts on this, but we're living in an age between the collapse of communism/socialism in 1989, and today. The world is incredibly better by every single metric.
- Marc Thiessen: Our friends across the way at Brookings had a report recently. In September of 2018, for the first time in human history, since the stone age, there are more people who are middle class or rich than there are people who are poor in the world.
- Marc Thiessen: The world is getting richer, people are more prosperous, fewer people living in abject poverty. There's better medicine, there's better health care, there's better access to it. There's cleaner water.
- Marc Thiessen: By almost every metric, the world is getting better. And why is that? It's because of the collapse of socialism and the rise of democratic capitalism, to contradict your phrase, because it is democratic, across the world. And here in the United States, we're doing better. I mean, if you were a human being and you were given a choice, you could be born at any time in human history from the moment of the creation of the earth until today, and you didn't pick now, you'd be insane. And it's because of capitalism. And so in the wake of all that, we're going to elect a socialist?
- Danielle Pletka: The answer is, I think come November, the answer to that will be absolutely not. I continue to believe that this is a center-right country, not a country that will accept a socialist. I think people are a lot more conservative on these issues than Bernie Sanders realizes, and I think the people who are the core of Bernie Sanders' base, young people, et cetera, are people who generally speaking, do not turn out to vote.

- Danielle Pletka: Whereas older people who, unlike Bernie Sanders, remember the true evil of socialism, the true evil of the Soviet Union, the true evil of the countries that he has admired over the years. The Castros, the Chavezs, the Ortegas in Nicaragua, all of those people who Bernie Sanders has made a point throughout his career of flattering, admiring, inviting when possible to the United States, or just going to visit them when he can.
- Marc Thiessen: On his honeymoon.
- Danielle Pletka: On his honeymoon, he went to the Soviet Union, right.
- Danielle Pletka: All the older people who make up the core of American voters do remember that, and I don't think they're going to pull the lever for Bernie.
- Marc Thiessen: But here's the other thing is that, the argument for democratic socialism is, we're not like those socialists. You always tar us with being Communists, and we were against the authoritarianism of the Soviet Union. Because Bernie's 78 years old, he has a record, he was friendly to all of those people at the time. So it's going to be very hard for him to separate himself from the socialist regimes.
- Danielle Pletka: He has softened those views though, somewhat. I mean, if you look at...
- Marc Thiessen: Grown in office.
- Danielle Pletka: Yeah, he's grown in office. And I mean, look, what you always want is you want someone to moderate their views in order to be more in-step with the zeitgeists of the American people. I think the challenge for us with Bernie Sanders is that that moderation belies six decades of history, and a six-decade record in which he did not distance himself. In which people like the Maduros, who are now crushing the Venezuelan people, people like Maduro were people he admired. He just called Maduro a vicious dictator. And I don't think that actually represents what he thinks.
- Marc Thiessen: Well, no. He was against recognizing Guaidó as the legitimate president of Venezuela.
- Danielle Pletka: He's been against a lot of things. He was against NATO expansion. He obviously was against the Iraq War, which you know, is a black mark in my book, but obviously for many Democratic voters is like a big, big, check mark.
- Danielle Pletka: I guess the whole narrative that our friend Jackson Diehl makes in the Washington Post recently in which he wrote a piece that's basically about the Bernie foreign policy you never knew, is that Bernie is really a democratic internationalist. I love Jackson, but I find that very hard to swallow.
- Marc Thiessen: Jackson is definitely a champion of democracy. But if you read that speech, this column he wrote was about this speech that Bernie Sanders gave in 2017 in Fulton, Missouri, in the same place where Churchill gave the Iron Curtain speech. It wasn't no Iron Curtain speech.
- Danielle Pletka: No, it wasn't. But it attempted, I thought very interestingly, to recast a record that frankly has not been supportive of democracy or of democratic internationalism, as

one that was. It was Bernie's extreme makeover speech. And, of course people who are with Bernie Sanders aren't with Bernie Sanders because of his foreign policy, let's be honest. But this is going to become an issue if he becomes the candidate.

- Danielle Pletka: Otherwise, I don't think any of the Bernie bros that are in his camp are people who are there because foreign policy has been a big element of what he has stood for. But here's his attempt. So what does he lay out for us exactly?
- Marc Thiessen: Well, he starts out by talking about all the young Americans killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and all the people that we killed, hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Marc Thiessen: Then he talks about how we spend too much on defense, that we spend more on defense than the next 12 nations combined.
- Danielle Pletka: And Bernie doesn't know that 50% of what we spend on defense is actually in defense entitlements, healthcare, pensions.
- Marc Thiessen: Exactly. The part of the speech that I thought was most telling, he says, "Some in Washington continue to argue that benevolent global hegemony should be a goal of our foreign policy, that the US by virtue of extraordinary military power should stand astride the world, and reshape it to its liking. I would argue events in the past two decades have utterly discredited that vision."
- Marc Thiessen: Basically, what he is against is the Pax Americana. What he described there is the foreign policy consensus of both Democrats and Republicans from the end of World War II through the Cold War up until very recently. And he's against it.
- Danielle Pletka: So I want to actually couch that another way. When we warn people about what it would mean if America ceded its leadership role, and we have this discussion a lot about Donald Trump, so this is not just about Bernie. What we warn people is, nature abhors a vacuum. Don't think to yourself that when the United States steps back, that other would-be leaders won't step in. Whether it's Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping.
- Danielle Pletka: And the only person, ironically, who would say, "Yeah, that'd be a good thing," would be Bernie Sanders, right? That's the difference. Most people were like, "Yeah, that would be a bad thing, but we can always jump back in when we need to." For Bernie Sanders, the answer is, "No. Everything that America touches in the world, it makes it worse. And maybe it'd be fine if Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping actually stood astride the world, and there was a Pax Sinica or a Pax Russica, or whatever it is that one would call it.
- Marc Thiessen: Or a Pax Pyongyangica.
- Danielle Pletka: I think even he might draw the line there.
- Danielle Pletka: But it's important to understand that it's not just that he is anti-America, and what America has done in the world, not just over the last 20 years, but over the last 70 years. But that he is against what America has wrought, which is a global system

that has brought us more prosperity and more peace than the world has ever known.

Marc Thiessen: That's exactly right. And look, the problem we face right now is that there's nobody making the argument for this system, for Pax Americana anymore, in either party.

Danielle Pletka: We need to go to our guest, but I want you to raise a particular issue that we were just talking about offline, because I think this is another element that people haven't paid attention to. Which is not what Bernie doesn't want to do, which we know about, and we can agree or disagree about, but some of the things that Bernie does want to do in the world, and what they're going to cost.

Marc Thiessen: So it's fascinating. There're two foreign policy questionnaires that the Democratic candidates have all been asked to fill out. One was by the New York Times, and the other one's by the Council on Foreign Relations, and Bernie filled out this one for the Council on Foreign Relations. And he was asked, "What are some of the foreign policy achievements you support since the end of the Cold War, or since the end of World War II?"

Marc Thiessen: So one of the things that he cited was the Marshall Plan, which he said was an accomplishment that was done "without firing a single bullet." Which is a little bit weird because we overthrew Nazi Germany with military force. But he talked about the Marshall Plan, and he says that we need a Green New Deal for the world. A Green New Deal for the world?

Danielle Pletka: Bad idea for us, imagine for the world.

Marc Thiessen: My friend Brian Riedl at the Manhattan Institute has actually gone and calculated the cost of Bernie Sanders' domestic proposals. The number he's come up with, \$97.5 trillion in new spending over 10 years.

Danielle Pletka: We can get it out of the defense budget.

Marc Thiessen: Exactly. 70% of GDP spent by government, half of the American workforce working for the government. That's the domestic. That's the Green New Deal here at home, and all the other stuff, and Medicare for all. He wants a Green New Deal for the world? How much is that going to cost?

Danielle Pletka: Can you really put a price on virtue though, Marc?

Marc Thiessen: No. Obviously if you're a democratic socialist, apparently not.

Danielle Pletka: Apparently not. So we've got Josh Rogin with us to talk about this. He had a terrific column in the Post called "[Bernie Sanders's foreign policy is a risk for Democrats against Trump.](#)" He's a good friend of ours, and a good friend of AEI's. He's a columnist for the Post, but he had worked previously at Bloomberg View, at Newsweek, at The Daily Beast, at Foreign Policy, at CQ.

Danielle Pletka: Now he's got this terrific column at the post, as you do Marc, and in addition he is an on-air commentator for CNN. So it's great to have him here.

- Marc Thiessen: Josh, welcome to the podcast.
- Josh Rogin: Great to be with you.
- Marc Thiessen: All right, so you just wrote a great column in the Washington Post and you said that Bernie Sanders' foreign policy poses an unappreciated risk for Democrats in a general election contest against Donald Trump.
- Marc Thiessen: Tell us why.
- Josh Rogin: Sure. Well, if you've watched the Democratic primary so far, you've noticed that foreign policy has not featured prominently in any way. Not in the debates. When it comes up, it's a two-line discussion that devolves into who voted for the Iraq War. The candidates don't bother, really, putting out foreign policy plans anymore. They're guessing that people don't go into the polling booth, close the curtain, and pull the lever based on your Libya position. Right?
- Josh Rogin: And in the context of the Democratic primary, the two sides are pretty well established. You've got a centrist, moderate, what used to be a leftist, but now as is centrist, Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg, and Amy Klobuchar. And then on the other side you've got Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, who are basically running against the foreign policy establishment and foreign policy record of both parties in the last 75 years.
- Josh Rogin: Now with Bernie Sanders it's particularly interesting because he has a 40, 50, 60 year record of doing interesting things on foreign policy that, again, has never really come up. And it occurred to a lot of people, who suggested this to me and that's why I wrote the column, that if and when he were to get into a battle with Donald Trump for the general election contest, that sort of moratorium on talking about all this stuff would definitely go away.
- Josh Rogin: And it's worth examining, first of all, do these policies present a vision of Bernie Sanders as a president, that is a vision of foreign policy that most people would like, and make sense, and would defend our interests and values? But secondly, what are the political vulnerabilities that Trump would surely exploit? And my column kind of focused on the second.
- Josh Rogin: So first I went back to when he was mayor of Vermont, and he was super active. He not only traveled to the Soviet Union, established a sister cities' relationship there with his hometown of Burlington, Vermont, he spoke praisingly about the Soviet system and alluded to the misconceptions of the United States of how bad it really was for the people there.
- Josh Rogin: A lot of those things seem ridiculous when you look at them. Then when he was in Burlington, he hosted not only Soviet officials, but Cuban officials. He traveled to Nicaragua to make common cause with the Ortega regime. And when I talked to the Bernie people about this, they were very clear. They said, "Listen, if you want to have a debate about 1980s Latin American death squads sponsored by the Reagan administration, fine. But we don't think that a lot of voters are really interested in that."

- Marc Thiessen: The 1980s called, they want their foreign policy back.
- Josh Rogin: Right. And it's true that if you ask most voters, "How do you feel about Reagan and Nicaragua?", you'll get a blank stare. But it forms an indisputable pattern of Bernie supporting leftist, socialist, what I would say authoritarian, regimes. And you could be sure that the Trump campaign would seize on that, and in fact, they already have.
- Josh Rogin: And then when you add the fact that Bernie self-identifies as a democratic socialist, well, then you could see the narrative emerging pretty clearly.
- Danielle Pletka: Now what's interesting about Bernie is of course that, I mean, he calls himself a democratic socialist. But of course, the people who he's admired so much over the years are not democratic socialists, they're tyrants. In the old days, people like us used to call people like Bernie Sanders, "fellow travelers." And that was not a nice expression. It's not so much en vogue anymore, but it basically meant that when given a choice to side with the United States or with our nuclear enemy, the Soviet Union, Bernie pretty much every time chose the Soviet Union.
- Danielle Pletka: And again, voted with his feet. He also, more recently, spoke very admiringly about the Cuban healthcare system, and about the healthcare system in Venezuela under Chavez. So I mean, it's not just old history. He's been talking this way, even in the 21st century.
- Josh Rogin: Right. You can see that his worldview is steeped in the idea that American values promotion and intervention, not just military intervention, but intervention of any kind abroad, is more negative than positive. So when he saw the US trying to work towards freedom, democracy and human rights in other countries, he stood on the other side of it in many instances. Now I think what's interesting is that when you bring it forward to 2020 or even to the time that he was a senator, his rhetoric and his framing has totally changed. He's become more professional about it. And what he will say, and I think this Venezuela example here is perfect, is that no, he's for democracy and freedom and human rights. He just wants to get there a different way. And that different way is not for us to push it or much less impose it, but to support whoever he believes at the time is supporting it and then you could quibble with which person he chose in which instance.
- Josh Rogin: He came under fire on the Venezuela thing because he didn't support the bipartisan and administration consensus that we should support or switch our recognition to Juan Guaidó. We could have a discussion about that all to itself because it doesn't really seem like that recognition has forced Maduro to step down and created the change in Venezuela that we seek. But the point is that that brought up his long history of supporting leftist regimes, sort of whitewashing their atrocities. And then he was pushed and he said, no, no, no. I believe that Maduro is a vicious tyrant, which is true, but basically we shouldn't do anything about it.
- Josh Rogin: And that's the gap in the new Bernie policy. It's not that he doesn't support democracy and human rights, it's just that he doesn't support doing much about it because he doesn't think America can play that role in the world. I think that's the biggest difference between him and the other guys.
- Marc Thiessen: But the way he couches it is he says, "Look, regime change has been bad. Iraq was

a bad war. We've been engaged in regime change around the world. We've got to stop using our military to change the regimes in foreign countries." But when he did this New York Times questionnaire, which they asked him about, the question was, "Is it appropriate for the United States to provide non-military support for regime change efforts as the Trump administration did in Venezuela?" And he said no. So he isn't just against military intervention, the argument for him is now he's pro-democracy. Our friend Jackson Diehl had a column the other day going back to the speech that he wrote in-

Josh Rogin: My boss.

Marc Thiessen: Yes, my boss too.

Marc Thiessen: So, but I mean basically going into the speech that he gave in Fulton, Missouri in 2017 where he talked about Trump's problem is that he's for the autocrats and aligning us with the autocrats, we've got to be for democracy. But when it comes to non-military support for the democratic movement in Venezuela, he's against it.

Josh Rogin: Right. So what centrist Democrats and what I think the Biden and Buttigieg and Klobuchar campaigns would say is that one of the greatest foreign policy attacks Democrats make against Trump is that he supported all these bad actors and made common cause with all these psychotic dictators. And Bernie's record undermines the ability of Democrats to make that argument.

Josh Rogin: But I think what you're getting at here is the broader problem that I see with progressive left Democrat foreign policy, which is that they want to essentially say that they support all of these things, but when it comes time to actually govern, they can't connect them to a policy that actually would result in any of those outcomes. If you don't believe in sanctions, if you don't believe in using aid as a tool of foreign policy, if you don't believe in military might or at least the threat of military might to pressure these bad actors to not stop their bad behavior, well then what exactly do you want to do that has any hope of promoting these things? And what they'll always say is, "Oh, well more diplomacy, more diplomacy, more diplomacy." Which nobody could argue against, but it doesn't get you from here to there.

Josh Rogin: And you see that in Elizabeth Warren's foreign policy too. She wants less military, more diplomacy, less intervention. But she still wants the world to adhere to American values of democracy, human rights, freedom, rule of law, accountability, transparency. And it just doesn't work, and no one could ever explain to me how you do more with less, how you protect America without doing anything about it. And how taking our hands off the steering wheel doesn't prevent the car from sliding off the road.

Danielle Pletka: Exactly. So I read your piece, read the answers to the New York Times questionnaire and then I went back and read Bernie's speech—2017, to be fair. What Bernie Sanders says in this speech makes absolutely no sense. He talks about what one of my former colleagues calls, "airy fairy crap." People to people exchanges. That's awesome. Who is against people to people exchanges? Maybe Donald Trump is. But of course he gives you absolutely no clear worldview in this speech except that he thinks that everything America has done, and he goes all the way back to the fifties and Mosaddegh, which of course he remembers more clearly than I do because thank God he's like 20 years older.



- Marc Thiessen: He was there.
- Danielle Pletka: He goes back and he excoriates the United States. His foreign policy vision is that everything America does in the world is bad, and if we're going to mitigate it, we should just bring foreigners over here and talk to them.
- Josh Rogin: And, again, if we're being fair to Bernie, let's be totally fair. If you say that all of America's foreign policy activities of the past seven years were bad, in a few instances, you'd definitely be right. So when you talk about the Iraq war vote, yeah he was right about that and Joe Biden was wrong. When you talk about PNTR for China, I believe he was right about that and Joe Biden was wrong. When he talked about his early opposition to the Saudi war in Yemen, or at least the tactics they use, I think facts have proven that he was more right than those who supported the Saudi intervention. But that doesn't mean that his theory of the case of how the world works is correct or that it's a good policy writ large.
- Josh Rogin: I mean, that's the problem with the whole endless wars crowd. Even Pete Buttigieg will go, "Oh, we've got to end the endless wars. We've got to end the endless wars." That sells in a primary, it might even sell in a general election.
- Danielle Pletka: Even Donald Trump has said it.
- Josh Rogin: Everyone. Yeah, Donald Trump is actually doing it. I was in Munich last weekend where they were planning the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- Danielle Pletka: Munich is a very popular place to surrender. That's what you need to remember, Josh.
- Marc Thiessen: For the listeners who are not familiar, this is the Munich Security Conference, which is often described as like a national security Davos.
- Josh Rogin: I call it a petting zoo for dictators. That's a separate podcast probably. But you know, the bottom line is that endless wars is a nice thing to say, but it doesn't mean anything unless you take the next step and explain, "Okay, how do we end the wars, but also keep America safe and also promote our values and interests?" That's what I haven't heard from Bernie or Warren for that matter.
- Marc Thiessen: So in that 2017 speech, it's interesting when he's talking about the people to people exchanges, he was explaining what he did in Burlington, Vermont when he was mayor and he said-
- Danielle Pletka: Funny you and I both picked this.
- Marc Thiessen: "I was Mayor of the city of Burlington, Vermont in the 1980s when the Soviet Union was our enemy." And the thought occurred to me, did he ever refer to the Soviet Union as our enemy during the Cold War?
- Marc Thiessen: Because, in your column you say that a democratic official associated with a rival campaign gave you a lot of documents from the Sanders archive at the University of Vermont about his foreign policy. Talk to us a little bit about how Bernie talked about the Soviet Union when the Cold War was actually going on as opposed to

now.

- Josh Rogin: Right. Basically he went there and he painted a rosy picture of how their system worked in terms of how it worked for their people, in terms of their people's agency to affect change. And he took the Soviet line of how their system was producing in a way that didn't match with the facts and definitely didn't match with the US policy at the time.
- Marc Thiessen: It didn't match with Gorbachev who was saying we need perestroika and glasnost.
- Josh Rogin: Exactly, exactly.
- Danielle Pletka: He was always more doctrinaire.
- Josh Rogin: I think, again, if you bring that forward, what you see is that he's become much more savvy about talking about these things. But let's look at what they're putting out and see if it matches with A, Bernie's record and B, what he's putting out in terms of what he would actually do in the world. And I think what you'll find is a stark departure from the consensus of American foreign policy, which again, voters may like, but has implications not only for Bernie versus Trump, but all of the other Democrats running underneath him. If he's going to be the standard bearer for the Democratic Party, this is a wholesale change in what Democratic foreign policy would be at a moment when actually, if you think about it, it's the Republicans who are turning inward under Trump and the Democrats were becoming more hawkish, especially on Russia. Again, for political reasons, but this would be a total reversal of that.
- Marc Thiessen: He's very hawkish on Russia now that the Cold War is over.
- Danielle Pletka: No, no, no, no. He's only hawkish on Russia because of Trump.
- Marc Thiessen: Same with most Democrats.
- Josh Rogin: So it gets to the core of the argument against nominating Bernie to lead the Democratic Party, which is that, are you trying to build enthusiasm on the far left to win a primary or are you trying to catch all of those people in the middle, in the middle of America, but also in the middle of the political spectrum who might actually win you the presidency, and foreign policy is just, again, one small piece of that?
- Danielle Pletka: So you pinpointed something that I think is really interesting, which is that basically Bernie Sanders has the exact foreign policy that the Koch brothers would have endorsed, obviously one remaining Koch brother, but this is basically anti-interventionism to the point of complete surrender in a variety of situations.
- Josh Rogin: Not on trade.
- Danielle Pletka: Well, they don't, because libertarians and socialists do not take the same view of unions.
- Josh Rogin: Exactly.

- Danielle Pletka: And do not take the same view of trade. Absolutely. Ironically, of course, Donald Trump is actually closer to Bernie on these kinds of issues than many.
- Josh Rogin: Tonight, we're going to have a debate where the two most prominent targets will be Bernie Sanders and Mike Bloomberg. And if you think about that, well that's even crazier because here you have Mike Bloomberg who's like a hawk on Iran, thinks Xi Jinping is not a dictator. And his foreign policy is a mess. And there could be a scenario where Bernie Sanders can argue that he's actually more pro-democracy and human rights than Mike Bloomberg because at least he has a theory of the case of how you get to that. And then Democrats looking for like a values-based, interests promoting foreign policy would have to think to themselves, "Oh my God, do I choose Mike Bloomberg who thinks that like the Chinese Communist Party is responsive to the democratic wishes of its people, which is insane. Or Bernie Sanders who doesn't want America to do anything in the world, but at least rhetorically supports the idea of democracy, freedom and human rights." And that would be unimaginable in any other democratic party scenario.
- Danielle Pletka: I want to talk to you a second about Israel because another thing you mentioned in your column, but has been a consistent pattern in Bernie Sanders' voting and in his political statements, is that he is very hostile to the state of Israel.
- Josh Rogin: Yeah, no, listen, I think Donald Trump has made a very clear political play, which is to be as pro-Netanyahu as physically possible, and that is a donor play, not a voter play. 74% of American Jews voted for Hillary Clinton despite the fact that she was less supportive of Netanyahu. But the big donors are more supportive of Netanyahu. And that has been the typical breakdown. Going back in these elections, we've never had a candidate as critical of, not just Netanyahu, but Israeli policy writ large as Bernie Sanders in a major campaign.
- Josh Rogin: There's no doubt that if you look at Bernie Sanders' beliefs, they line up with Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, AOC. These are the people who believe that a wholesale change in the US approach to Israel is warranted based on their grievances with Israeli policies of all kinds.
- Danielle Pletka: So is it unfair for us to sort of analogize Sanders to Corbyn, the Labour Party leader in the UK?
- Josh Rogin: I think Corbyn has been more outwardly and publicly saying things that you could pin as antisemitic. Although I don't claim to be a Corbyn expert, I think this antisemitic charge is easy to throw around and it's actually not really helpful because I don't think that Bernie would admit that or even claim that that's something that he feels in his heart.
- Josh Rogin: So let's just put that aside and say that his views on Israel and the occupation represent, again, a very small part of the American electorate and actually a relatively small part of the American Jewish electorate. Most American Jews, including myself, including my parents, are somewhere in the middle, right? They have issues with things that Netanyahu has done and some of the implementation of the occupation, but they don't want to go as far to the left as Bernie would have. But that's seems to be how he believes and that's what he's going to run on, and again, I think that has implications for Democrats down the ticket.

- Marc Thiessen: Quick question, then a follow up. Would you agree that Bernie Sanders' foreign policy views are out of the mainstream, traditional Democratic mainstream?
- Josh Rogin: Absolutely. And that's their selling point. That's what he likes about it.
- Marc Thiessen: And so here's the question: In 2016, a lot of conservative internationalists came out, the Never Trump movement started and they came out and they signed letters and they said that Trump's foreign policy wants to break with the traditions of American engagement, he doesn't support NATO, he doesn't support all these things, and Never Trump. Where's the Never Bernie movement?
- Josh Rogin: Well, I think you're going to see it on the debate stage tonight in Nevada, but listen-
- Danielle Pletka: Are we actually, because-
- Marc Thiessen: Not the candidates, I'm talking about like where are the people who served in the Obama administration and the Clinton administration in foreign policy positions who are appalled at the direction that Bernie Sanders wants to take our country on foreign policy and are willing to stand up and say Never Bernie.
- Josh Rogin: That's a good question to ask. I think, two things. One, how did all those Never Trump letters really work out? They didn't stop Trump and they kept a lot of good people who subsequently wanted to serve from getting served. And that's not their fault. That's Trump's fault. So I think that if you had to do a sort of a back analysis on that, maybe some Democrats saw that as not working out the way that they wanted it to. It could be a lack of courage. It could be the fact that we haven't gotten there yet, right? Most centrist Democrats are still trying to stop Bernie and they haven't figured out how to do that. And I also think what you're getting at here is really a core issue, which is: do centrists, right, and left foreign policy candidates have a political constituency for that foreign policy?
- Danielle Pletka: That's a great question.
- Josh Rogin: Where has that gone, right? We say over and over again that, "Oh, well the establishment failed to bring along the regular American people in this project that we've been building since the Cold War at least, or maybe since World War II. We failed to address the downsides of globalization for American workers."
- Marc Thiessen: True.
- Josh Rogin: And that's a failure of both parties and a lot of us in Washington that we can't ignore. So the result is that, and also with the diversification of the media and the fact that a lot of voters are now just going to those parts of the internet where this type of foreign policy lives, we're not making the sale. Okay? So it's hard for centrist Democrats, even the ones who believe this, to get up and say to their constituents, "Oh no, Bernie's foreign policy is so dangerous, it has to be stopped," because they're going to lose half their voters because they haven't figured out how to sell their vision of American foreign policy, despite the fact that I would say it's provided the world with 80 years of the most prosperity, freedom and advancement of humankind in history. People don't buy that anymore. And so until

we make that connection, the political constituency, for what I call sane foreign policy, it's just not there.

Marc Thiessen: Well the irony is, is that when Trump was sort of shaking up the system, one of the arguments about Trump, it wasn't so much isolationism. It was, "We don't win anymore." He always said "America doesn't win anymore." And he was really an indictment of both conservative and liberal internationalist. Not on the idea so much-

Danielle Pletka: Snatching defeat from the jaws of victory in Afghanistan, Marc?

Marc Thiessen: -but in delivery. Whether you think it was right or wrong to go into Iraq, we clearly messed it up. We clearly didn't do a good job in a lot of the things we were trying to do in Afghanistan and-

Danielle Pletka: And so we should give up?

Marc Thiessen: But he was basically saying-

Danielle Pletka: But that's what he's saying now, we should give up.

Marc Thiessen: I'm not defending Trump.

Danielle Pletka: Oh good.

Marc Thiessen: What I'm saying is... Dany, I'm trying to make a point which is that the conservative and liberal internationalists did a really bad job-

Josh Rogin: Exactly.

Marc Thiessen: -for over two administrations, in a lot of ways, in delivering on their promises. And so there was an element of Trump saying we don't win, and so when he strikes Soleimani, very popular. When he struck Syria twice, very popular. When he was threatening, back in the fire and fury phase of our relationship with North Korea, very popular. When he said that he might-

Danielle Pletka: Before we entered the French kissing phase of our relationship with North Korea.

Marc Thiessen: Exactly. So, the point is that the American people are not isolationists. They're reluctant internationalists. And so, the response to Trump was rules-based international order, that phrase. Right? Ironically, that's what Bernie is saying. We need rules-based international order.

Josh Rogin: Right.

Marc Thiessen: Not American might.

Josh Rogin: Right.

Marc Thiessen: But we need to create like this web of treaties and international organizations to

take care of the world, because it's not our problem.

- Josh Rogin: Right. So you know, I don't know what you've seen, but what I've seen in three years of the Trump administration is incoherence. Okay? Chaos. And then if you look closely under the hood, it's an ongoing battle competition between all of those things that Trump campaigned on, and all of the people he had to hire who don't believe any of those things. And sometimes Trump wins, sometimes those people win. Eventually the house wins. Eventually Trump gets his way on most of these things.
- Josh Rogin: But that unresolved chaos is just disaster for US foreign policy because it's destroyed signaling, it's destroyed messaging, it's destroyed the ability of our allies to have any predictability about what we're doing.
- Danielle Pletka: Although it has enhanced deterrence. Because when no one knows what the hell you're going to do, at least everybody's afraid of what you might do.
- Josh Rogin: Yeah. But on the other hand, a lot of people, a lot of bad actors have abused that vacuum to advance their policies.
- Danielle Pletka: For sure.
- Josh Rogin: In the end without any pushback whatsoever. Now what I think, because Bernie's foreign policy's the other side of that coin, but he's actually arguably more competent and more thought out. I doubt that he would come in if elected president and bring back Tony Blinken and Jake Sullivan, and all these Obama-Clinton people, because he knows better, right? He's going to more drastically change the face of US foreign policy, and I would say more efficiently, and that's going to have reverberating effects around the world.
- Josh Rogin: So it's not going to be like Trump where one day he's kissing Kim Jong Un and the next day he's bombing Iran. Right? Bernie is prepared to implement a foreign policy that would be a drastic departure. And that has huge implications, not just for America, but for people all over the world that we, again, in this political environment, we haven't even begun to really think of all, the farthest we could get is like, "Oh, it's a political vulnerability for him." Which is true, but if he were elected, well, that would have much more serious implications that we haven't begun to talk about.
- Danielle Pletka: Right. And yet Bernie speaks sort of glowingly of the United Nation's ability to solve problems. Is that a liability for him or does nobody give a damn anymore?
- Josh Rogin: In the litany of foreign policy issues, I don't think United Nations support ranks high, one way or the other. You know, most people I talk to voters, regular Americans, say they think it's basically marginalized and unimportant and not a big issue. But what you're getting at I think is an important point to close on, which is that, you know, right now we have a system of alliances that underpins our strength and influence and power.
- Josh Rogin: And again, in the Munich Security Conference you saw there's a lot of tension in those relationships. All right? And if Bernie is going to be president, then he's

going to totally change the nature of all those relationships as well. And that is not just about the United Nations, that's about all our alliances, all our counter-terrorism partnerships. If he pulls us out of Syria and Afghanistan, as Trump may do anyway, what does that say to all of the people there who we're working with? What does that have to do with our ability to fight terrorism?

- Danielle Pletka: But also NATO. He's been very hostile to NATO expansion, he's been very hostile to the whole notion of the transatlantic alliance and what it represents.
- Josh Rogin: Yes. It's almost as if President Trump broke American foreign policy, and someone's got to put it back together. And if that's Joe Biden, well, then he's going to try to tape it together kind of in the way that existed before. And if it's Bernie Sanders, well, he's going to take all of those pieces, and he's going to make something totally different. And that is not something that at this point in our country that I think is a good idea, but more importantly that we can predict, or that we can plan for. So that's a further set of disruptions, a further set of unknowns, a further set of important questions that he's going to be in charge of answering.
- Marc Thiessen: Absolutely. Exit question. Does any of this matter? Is this going to move any votes?
- Josh Rogin: You know, some, for sure. How many? We don't know. I think essentially it depends on what happens between now and the election because foreign policy matters when things are on fire, when things are really bad. I remember 2004, foreign policy mattered a lot. Okay? And not because people supported the Iraq War, but because it was going really badly and they didn't. George W. Bush was able to convince people that we shouldn't change courses in the middle of that situation.
- Josh Rogin: Right now everything is teetering on the edge of disaster. North Korea, Kim Jong Un, if he's smart, and I think actually he is, will launch a provocation right around September, October, right? The economy-
- Marc Thiessen: An October surprise, you could call it.
- Josh Rogin: Exactly. The coronavirus is going to tank the Chinese economy, and take the rest of the economy with it maybe, and that's going to be unsettling. And then when President Trump announces, as it gets close to the election, that maybe we're pulling out of Afghanistan and Syria again, Syria for the third time, right? That's going to cause chaos in that region as well. And we haven't even talked about Iran, which is still not over the Soleimani killing and still suffering under sanctions that they don't like.
- Josh Rogin: So when we get to November, if Trump can make the argument that "Hey, the world is looking pretty cool and pretty awesome right now," whether or not that's true, if he could sell that, then foreign policy won't matter at all. But you know, on the downside risk, if all of his schemes and gambits are blowing up in his face, either figuratively or literally, voters are going to care a lot. The voters are going to care a lot. But by that point for Democrats, it may be too late.
- Marc Thiessen: Awesome. Josh, thank you so much for joining us.

- Josh Rogin: Anytime.
- Danielle Pletka: You were terrific. Great column, too.
- Josh Rogin: Thank you.
- Danielle Pletka: So I'm thinking about our conversation and wondering whether we should title this episode "Stalin's last laugh."
- Danielle Pletka: I mean who would have thought in 1989 that we would ever—within the next 30 years—be having a conversation about a leader of the United States who thought it was a good idea to have his honeymoon in Moscow, just in 1988. It's just-
- Marc Thiessen: Ironically, the year before the fall of the Berlin Wall. He was wrong and he was wrong late.
- Danielle Pletka: Yeah. No, that's right. He was wrong when everybody else was-
- Marc Thiessen: -communism was collapsing.
- Danielle Pletka: Exactly.
- Marc Thiessen: You know, "This system is great. It's much better than ours." Boom, comes down the wall. Boom, spread of freedom and democracy and rejection of socialism all across the world.
- Danielle Pletka: And what really actually sticks in my craw, you know, look, I mean there are a lot of people I'm sure among our listeners as well who aren't going to agree with me about the Iraq War and that's fine. I will find you though. But, there are plenty, but what really sticks in my craw about Bernie Sanders' record is NATO expansion because I want to press people to think about this for a second. We were locked in a half century plus battle with the forces of evil, and the Soviet Union had in the Warsaw Pact, which was the opposite side to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to NATO, it had these captive nations, Poland, Hungary, what was then called Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Romania.
- Danielle Pletka: And the notion that after the collapse of the Soviet empire, we would not reach out to those countries-
- Marc Thiessen: And bring them into the West.
- Danielle Pletka: -and embrace them and bring them into the West and extend our security umbrella over them? And that somebody would oppose that, is to me so gross and so antithetical to everything that America stands for in the world, I just don't understand it.
- Marc Thiessen: No, I agree with you and look, but here's the interesting thing about Bernie Sanders is that there's a lot, as we talked about in the intro, there's parallel between him and Trump in the sense they're both non-interventionists, and they both want to pull back from the world. The differences are, and I'm critical of a lot of elements



of Donald Trump's foreign policy as anyone who listens to this or reads my Washington Post column will know, the difference is that Trump at least gets some things right. I mean, he did enforce the red line in Syria and actually whack the regime twice. He did kill Soleimani. He is pouring a lot more money into the Defense Department. He's trying to follow a policy of peace through strength. I don't like his withdrawals. I don't like pulling out of Afghanistan and Syria, and not leaving at least some forces there to do that.

Marc Thiessen: But Bernie is like all of the bad things about Trump, but then none of the good things. None of them.

Danielle Pletka: You and I disagree about what some of the good things are about Trump, but I will say this, when Bernie Sanders criticized Donald Trump for abandoning the Kurds in Syria, I thought to myself, "Dude, you wouldn't have been there in the first place."

Marc Thiessen: Absolutely.

Danielle Pletka: There would be more than half a million people dead. ISIS would still be there. Al Qaeda would still be there. You know, this is the problem, and this is the challenge for all of those people. I completely agree that we in some ways have had an over militarized approach to foreign policy, which has led to our unbelievably lame winning the peace efforts in Afghanistan, in Iraq and elsewhere. And I think that that's a really legit criticism that people have of me, my ilk, you, our ilk, and of our foreign policy in general.

Danielle Pletka: But I want people to remember that the opposite of having a military strategy in these places is, for the most part, in the world of Bernie Sanders and George Soros and the Koch brothers, all of whom are fellow travelers on this particular foreign policy, the opposite is doing nothing. Doing nothing about the genocide.

Marc Thiessen: And disarming, also on top of that. I mean, you know, Ronald Reagan, it's often said, intervened less in the world than almost any president in modern times. But he had a strong military. He rebuilt our military. If you believe in diplomacy, you have to believe in a strong military because diplomacy has to be backed up by something. You know, the old phrase Teddy Roosevelt, "Speak softly and carry a big stick." Without the big stick speaking softly, speaking loud, doesn't matter how you speak if you don't have the stick.

Marc Thiessen: And so, you know the fact that Bernie Sanders wants to gut our military in order to fund Medicare For All, a Green New Deal, pay off everybody's student loans... a bunch of working class people, whose kids don't go to college, to pay for the student loans of the elites who do go to college. All of this spending, gutting the military, you know, it's going to create more problems and more threats to the United States than less. You can't have good diplomacy if it's not backed up by strength.

Danielle Pletka: So last word on this, the one thing that I would say is look with great skepticism at this claim, that Sanders, but also Warren, and others are making, which is no, no, no, it's not that we don't want to do anything in the world, it's that we want to support democracy in the world through diplomacy and peaceful means and development. Okay? Because that's garbage. I want someone to show me the evidence that Bernie Sanders supported democracy promotion anywhere in his

career.

Marc Thiessen: Anywhere.

Danielle Pletka: Because in fact what he has supported is the antithesis of democracy. The Castros, the Chavezs, the Soviet leaders.

Marc Thiessen: Ortegas.

Danielle Pletka: The Ortegas. These are the people who he invited to Vermont when he was mayor of Burlington. He doesn't support democracy. He just opposes America.

Marc Thiessen: Yeah. Well look, there're two types of people in the world. The people who wake up in the morning and say, "America is everything that's wrong in the world" and the people who wake up in the morning and say, "America is mostly what's right in the world." And we're not perfect, and we have our flaws, but we are what's good in the world. This country is freer, more prosperous, has more opportunity for people than any country in the history of the world. And we do more good for people around the world, just by our presence and the peace that we have brought to the world by our strength. And you know, I wake up in the morning and say, "Yeah, we've got our problems, but we're a force for good in the world." And Bernie Sanders doesn't really fundamentally believe that.

Danielle Pletka: Unfortunate, but true. Thanks folks for listening. It's great to have you again. Don't forget to send us your suggestions. Don't forget to subscribe per our sponsor, Marc Thiessen, and see you next week.