

The US left, Ukraine, and Biden

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While Republican politicians are queuing up to take on Donald Trump for the party's nomination next year, there's hardly anything going on in the other camp. Unless he falls ill or changes his mind, Joe Biden will undoubtedly be the Democratic Party candidate. Only three people with any name recognition have challenged him inside the Democratic Party or to its left. They are a diverse crowd, but one thing unites them – and it's not what you'd expect.

To the left of the Democrats, Cornel West has announced he's running for president. It's unclear which party will support him as he initially spoke about the People's Party, but lately, he seems to be aiming to run as a Green. West is a well-known left-wing academic and former supporter of Bernie Sanders. Last week a top Democratic strategist warned that a good showing by the Greens in next year's election could lead to Biden's defeat. Meanwhile, some left-wing voices are calling on West to follow Sanders' example and run as a Democrat.

Among the Democrats, two candidates have emerged with significant support, according to the polls. The first is anti-vaxxer and conspiracy theorist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. According to some polls, Kennedy is getting 20% of the Democratic vote. Trailing behind him is Marianne Williamson, author and celebrity guru to Oprah Winfrey. Williamson ran briefly in 2020 but pulled out of the race before the first primary. In her campaign launch speech and subsequently, she has been channelling Bernie Sanders, speaking about social justice, working people and the power of billionaires.

On the face of it, West, Kennedy and Williamson have little in common other than a certain degree of name recognition and the fact that none of them are Joe Biden. There is evidence that many former Sanders supporters are lining up to support them, even though Sanders has clearly backed Biden for re-election.

What they have in common is their support for Putin's war on Ukraine.

West has very little detail about his foreign policy (or anything else) on his official campaign website, but here's what he says that will warm the Russian dictator's heart: "Bring our troops home and invest those trillions of war dollars into American communities. Support veterans, stop all foreign military aid, close the bases, disband NATO, and ban nuclear weapons globally." If West were ever given the keys to the Oval Office and had the chance to withdraw the US from NATO, that would mark the end of Ukraine – and guarantee Russian domination over Europe. The organisation West is most closely associated with is Democratic Socialists of America, which has advocated for the dissolution of NATO.

Kennedy also blamed the West and NATO for the war in Ukraine and pledged to end US involvement there. Williamson has been slightly less specific but has not supported US aid to Ukraine, instead advocating the creation of a Department of Peace.

None of these candidates represents a serious challenge to Biden. But all of them represent a serious threat nonetheless. The entire field of Republican candidates, led by Trump, are outspoken

supporters of Putin and enemies of Ukraine. The Democrats who challenge Biden (and those to their left) are no better.

Even if Biden wins re-election, which now seems likely though a lot can change in the next 16 months, the discourse in America has completely shifted. The consensus in the UK, with the major parties opposing Russian aggression, does not exist there. A significant part of the public, including on the left, opposes any further support for Ukraine.

America needs a left that vigorously supports Ukraine in the same way that a previous generation supported the Spanish Republic during that country's Civil War. A left that opposes imperialism — including Russian imperialism — and that will not turn its back on the Ukrainian people in their hour of need. Such a left does not yet exist in America, and its creation is a matter of some urgency.

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