

Tlaib agrees to Israeli terms, then reverses herself on West Bank visit

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The events of the past two days have provided a fresh demonstration of the inveterate cowardice of the Democratic Party and the absence within it of any principled opposition to Donald Trump's authoritarian agenda.

On Thursday morning, Trump took the unprecedented step of publicly urging a foreign government to bar entry to elected US officials because of their political views. He called on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to ban the planned visit this weekend of freshmen Democratic congresswomen Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan to the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The two are critics of Israel's repression of the Palestinians and supporters of the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) movement against the Israeli state. In pressing Netanyahu to reverse a previous decision to allow the visit, Trump repeated the lie that Omar and Tlaib "hate Israel and all Jewish people."

Shortly thereafter, the Israeli government announced that it was barring the two congresswomen, the first Muslim women elected to the US Congress. For Trump, the move was a renewal of his attack on Omar and Tlaib and two other freshmen House members, Ayanna Pressley and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, whom he denounced last month as socialists who "hate our country," adding that they should "go back where they came from."

For Netanyahu, the move was likewise an appeal to far-right and fascistic forces, made with a view to next month's contentious Israeli elections. Facing multiple corruption charges, a loss could mean a prison term for the four-time prime minister.

Thursday night, Tlaib sent a letter to Israeli Interior Minister Aryeh Deri pleading to be given permission to visit her family on the West Bank. She wrote:

Minister Deri:

I would like to request admittance to Israel in order to visit my relatives, and specifically my grandmother, who is in her 90s and lives in Beit Ur

al-Fouqa. This could be my last opportunity to see her. I will respect any restrictions and will not promote boycotts against Israel during my visit.

Thank you.

Tlaib said nothing about lifting the ban on her fellow congresswoman, Omar.

In response to this capitulatory note, Deri announced Friday morning that the Israeli government would allow Tlaib to visit the West Bank, provided that she "live up to her promise and that the visit will only be for humanitarian needs," i.e., that she would remain silent on Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people.

Then the Detroit-based congresswoman reversed herself and announced that she would not accept the Israeli offer. She issued a statement that said, in part, "I have decided that visiting my grandmother under these oppressive conditions stands against everything I believe in—fighting against racism, oppression & injustice."

Tlaib had evidently come under pressure from critics of Israel and supporters of the BDS movement. The *Guardian* quoted, for example, Nour Odeh, a former spokeswoman for the Palestinian Authority, as saying, "What is truly upsetting is that Rashida Tlaib fell in this trap and accepted to demean herself and grovel."

Tlaib's response to Trump's dictatorial violation of constitutional norms, according to which Congress is a co-equal and independent branch of the federal government, was a particularly sniveling example of the general response of the Democratic Party and media outlets aligned with it, such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

Despite the fact that Trump's attacks on "progressive" Democrats such as Omar and Tlaib are calculated to incite violence from the fascistic elements among his supporters—leading to events such as the mass shooting by a Mexican-hating fascist gunman in El Paso—the Democrats have once again brushed over the profoundly anti-democratic and authoritarian substance of his actions.

Instead, they have criticized the ban as a threat to the bipartisan “special relationship” between the US and Israel. In the lead editorial of its Friday print edition, the *New York Times* complained: “But to put at risk, so cynically, America’s special relationship with Israel solely to titillate the bigots in his base... How sad that two leaders... are risking a bipartisan relationship built between these two nations over generations.”

A column by the *Washington Post*’s Jennifer Rubin, titled “Israel’s ban of Omar and Tlaib is a grave misstep,” argued against the ban on the grounds that it weakened bipartisan support for Israel and strengthened the BDS movement.

The Democratic-controlled House overwhelmingly passed a bipartisan resolution last month condemning the boycott Israel movement. Moreover, Washington is set to give Israel \$3.1 billion this year as part of a 10-year, \$38 billion military aid package reached under the Obama administration.

In a fairly perceptive commentary on the banning of the congresswomen, a rarity in the corporate media, Joshua Leifer wrote in Friday’s *Guardian* :

It is clear, from their widespread condemnation of the decision that the pro-Israel establishment would have much preferred if Omar and Tlaib’s visit to Israel had passed without incident—that they would have liked to have avoided Israel appearing so obviously in the wrong. But the tactically savvy pro-Israel groups, those that fret about keeping support for Israel a bipartisan issue, no longer possess the same power they once did. Today, the Trump administration’s Mideast policy is determined by an alliance of the religious, pro-settler Jewish right and Christian evangelicals.

The Democratic leadership has echoed Trump’s efforts to brand critics of Israel on the left as anti-Semites. In March, the Democrats in the House spearheaded a resolution tacitly singling out remarks by Omar critical of Israel and the Israel lobby in the US as “anti-Semitic.”

In their news articles and commentaries on the current controversy, both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have made a point of alluding to Omar’s supposed anti-Semitism. In its lead article on Friday, the *Times* wrote: “Ms. Omar, who has drawn criticism even from fellow Democrats for engaging in anti-Semitic tropes in criticizing Israel...” The *Post* editorial on Friday stated that “Both [Omar and Tlaib] have made statements that play on anti-Semitic tropes.”

The Trump administration is a government of permanent crisis, despised by a large majority of the American people and buffeted by mounting signs of recession, financial instability and the growth of working class opposition in the US and internationally. Its greatest asset is the feckless and right-wing character of its nominal opposition—the Democratic Party.

On Thursday night, in the midst of the controversy over the barring of Omar and Tlaib, Trump continued his fascistic demagoguery at a campaign-style rally in Manchester, New Hampshire. He reiterated the three major themes of his reelection campaign: anti-immigrant racism, promotion of the police and military, and rants against socialism, which he absurdly links to the Democratic Party.

He declared: “Republicans believe our cities should be sanctuaries for law abiding Americans, not for criminal aliens. And we will always support the amazing heroes of ICE and Border Patrol and we will always support law enforcement... No matter what label they use, a vote for any Democrat in 2020 is a vote for the rise of radical socialism and the destruction of the American dream.”

The inability and refusal of the Democrats to defend democratic principles and expose the fascistic agenda of Trump shows that the collapse of bourgeois democracy and turn to authoritarian forms of rule are not rooted in the personality of Donald Trump. Rather, Trump is an expression of the breakdown of democratic forms under conditions of an unprecedented crisis of world capitalism, an immense growth of social inequality, an eruption of great power conflict and trade war and a resurgence of the class struggle.

The Democrats’ central preoccupation—and this includes its phony “progressive” wing—is to politically disarm the working class, suppress its struggles and channel the mass opposition to Trump behind an agenda of war and austerity.



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