

Democratic leaders support charges of “anti-Semitism” in response to Ilhan Omar’s criticisms of Israeli war crimes in Gaza

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This week has seen yet another revolting example of the Democratic Party’s support for Israeli atrocities against the Palestinian population of the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

Just weeks after the Israel Defense Forces’ 11-day bombardment of the virtually defenseless inhabitants of Gaza, an impoverished coastal enclave of two million people suffering under a 14-year blockade by the Israeli state, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the rest of her House leadership team publicly rebuked Rep. Ilhan Omar for criticizing “unthinkable atrocities” committed by Israel and the US.

The one-sided slaughter, carried out with highly sophisticated planes, missiles and smart bombs supplied largely by the United States, resulted in the deaths of 248 Gazans, including 66 children and 39 women, and another 31 West Bank Palestinians, bringing the total death toll across all Palestinian territories to 279. With the massively outgunned Hamas government in Gaza able to respond only with primitive rockets, the Israeli death toll was 12.

The Israeli military reduced much of the region to rubble, knocking out water and sanitation infrastructure and bombing high-rise buildings, including a building housing the offices of the Associated Press, Al Jazeera and other media outlets. It used US-supplied smart bombs to destroy hospitals, schools and ambulances.

As in the three previous Israeli wars against Gaza so far this century, under Bush and Obama, the Biden administration and the corporate media falsely portrayed Hamas as the aggressor, ignoring the moves by the Israeli government to evict Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem and the police storming of the al-Aqsa Mosque, which provoked the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel.

As millions around the world looked on in horror and disgust, including Israeli Jews who protested together with Israeli Palestinians, all wings of the Democratic Party, including the so-called “progressive” Bernie Sanders, proclaimed Israel’s “right to defend itself,” i.e., the right of a massively armed occupying power to indiscriminately bomb and kill those it illegally occupies.

Last Monday, Rep. Omar, one of two Muslim women elected to Congress in 2018, posted a tweet citing a question she put to Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee: “We must have the same level of accountability and justice for all victims of crimes against humanity. We have seen unthinkable atrocities committed by the US, Hamas, Israel, Afghanistan and the Taliban.”

It would be legitimate to criticize Omar for implying an equivalence between the defensive actions of Hamas and the war crimes committed by Israel and the United States. But Omar’s statement triggered a right-wing response by 12 Jewish House Democrats for suggesting that Israel and the US are guilty of any terrorist actions or atrocities.

The Democrats, led by Rep. Bradley Schneider of Illinois, released a joint statement Wednesday night effectively accusing Omar of covering for terrorist groups and harboring anti-Semitic sentiments. It declared: “Ignoring the differences between democracies governed by the rule of law and contemptible organizations that engage in terrorism at best discredits one’s intended argument and at worst reflects deep-seated prejudice... false equivalencies give cover to terrorist groups. We urge Congresswoman Omar to clarify her words placing the US and Israel in the same category as Hamas and the Taliban.”

The signatories included Reps. Jake Auchincloss (Massachusetts), Ted Deutsch (Florida), Lois Frankel

(Florida), Josh Gottheimer (New Jersey), Elaine Luria (Virginia), Kathy E. Manning (North Carolina), Jerrold Nadler (New York), Dean Phillips (Minnesota), Kim Schrier (Washington), Brad Sherman (California) and Debbie Wasserman Schultz (Florida).

Last month, a number of Democrats sent a letter to President Biden asserting that accusing Israel of “committing acts of terrorism” was anti-Semitic. This was prompted by a tweet from Omar in which she said that “Israeli airstrikes killing civilians in Gaza is an act of terrorism.” She added, “We cannot equate legitimate criticism of the Israeli government, its policy, and its military occupation with anti-Semitism.”

Omar initially responded to the statement of the 12 Democrats by warning of the dangerous consequences of branding all critics of the Israeli government as “anti-Semites” and apologists for terrorist groups. Noting that she has long been targeted by far-right elements in and around the Republican Party, she reported receiving threats, including being called “a raghead N-word,” and her staff being called “anti-American communist piece[s] of shit.”

“This is the kind of incitement and hate that leads to real violence,” she said.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, herself the target of threats of violence, including from the fascist Republican Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, tweeted: “They have no concept for the danger they put her in by skipping private conversations & leaping to fueling targeted news cycles around her.”

This, however, was considered insufficiently conciliatory by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and the rest of the House Democratic leadership, who, one must assume, received input from the White House.

Later on Thursday, Omar issued a further statement backtracking from her initial tweet. Claiming she had been misconstrued, she said she was not making “a moral comparison between Hamas and the Taliban and the US and Israel.” She added, “I was in no way equating terrorist organizations with democratic countries with well-established judicial systems.”

Pelosi and her Democratic leadership team followed with a joint statement essentially supporting the slanderous letter issued by the 12 Democrats Wednesday night. Declaring that they welcomed Omar’s “clarification,” they wrote that equating the United States and Israel with terrorist groups (that is, groups listed by the US government as terrorist) such as Hamas and the

Taliban “foments prejudice.”

This latest reactionary attempt to equate criticism of the criminal policies of the Israeli government with anti-Semitism is, of course, a political gift to the far-right and fascist forces gathering within the framework of the Trump-dominated Republican Party. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, who opposes any investigation of Trump’s January 6 coup attempt and defends fascist and anti-Semitic lawmakers such as Marjorie Taylor Greene, attacked Pelosi in a tweet, writing that her “continued failure to address the issues in her caucus sends a message to the world that Democrats are tolerant of anti-Semitism and sympathizing with terrorists.”

In 2019, Pelosi and company in a similar fashion joined in witch-hunting Omar, equating her criticisms of Israeli oppression of the Palestinians and the far-reaching influence of the Israeli lobby on US politics with anti-Semitism. Pelosi obtained passage of a bipartisan House resolution that linked Omar, without naming her, to such crimes as the persecution of Alfred Dreyfus in France, the lynching of Leo Frank in Georgia, the mass incarceration of Japanese-Americans in World War II, and the massacre of 11 worshippers at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh the previous October.

Such episodes demonstrate the impossibility of transforming the Democratic Party, one of the oldest capitalist parties in the world and a ruthless defender of the interests of the US oligarchy at home and around the world, into an instrument of progressive change. Omar and other Democratic “progressives,” including Democratic Socialists of America members such as Ocasio-Cortez, react to the increasing exposure of this reactionary party and the Biden government which they support as defenders of US imperialism concerned over the collapse of its human rights pretensions.



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