

New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez reneges on pledge to vote against bill funding Israeli war crimes

Jacob Crosse
28 September 2021

Last Thursday, the House of Representatives in an overwhelming 420-9 bipartisan vote, passed supplemental legislation that would provide \$1 billion to the “Government of Israel for the procurement of the Iron Dome defense system” and “in support of Operation Guardian of the Walls.”

The bill was brought to the floor separately from the spending package it was originally attached to after New York Representative and Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, spearheaded the effort, along with other members of the “Squad,” such as Democratic lawmakers Ilhan Omar (Minnesota-5th district) and Rashida Tlaib (Michigan-13th district) to have the military funding stripped from the emergency spending package.

Ocasio-Cortez, despite her denunciations earlier this year of the Biden administration’s support for Israeli military action and leading the effort to have it stripped out, at the last minute on Thursday after the votes were counted, reversed her “no” vote against the funding and instead voted “present” on the bill, essentially taking no position against the ongoing Israeli ethnic cleansing campaign against the Palestinians.

After her reversal, CSPAN cameras observed the congresswoman crying and the next day, Ocasio-Cortez released a 900+ word statement admitting she “wept” while attempting, and failing, to explain her backslide.

“I want to be clear with our community that I am opposed to this bill, but ultimately cast a PRESENT vote. My job as your representative is to first and foremost serve with transparency and remain accountable to you, the people of New York’s 14th Congressional District,” wrote Ocasio-Cortez.

The DSA member explained that the US had already provided, “\$1.7 billion for the Iron Dome and is already financially committed to continuing these funds through 2028. This bill adds an additional \$1 billion in funding in one year to this system, along for context, that is an amount in one year that approaches all the funding to this system we have provided over the last decade—and this is in addition to the \$3 billion authorized earlier this year in other forms of military funding to the Israeli government.”

Ocasio-Cortez wrote that in addition to “opposing the

substance” of the bill, she thought “the process of bringing it to the House floor was deeply unjust.” Ocasio-Cortez blamed “House leadership” for rushing the supplemental bill, and thereby creating a “tinderbox of vitriol, disingenuous framing, deeply racist accusation and depictions, and a lack of substantive discussion on the matter.”

“Yes, I wept,” wrote Ocasio-Cortez. “I wept at the complete lack of care for the human beings that are impacted by these decisions...” The New York legislator added, “To those I have disappointed—I am deeply sorry. To those who believe this reason is insufficient or cowardice—I understand.”

She ended her letter by expressing her support for growing a “true, substantive movement of community support for human rights around the world—which includes cherishing and respecting the human rights of Palestinian people.”

How one could vote “present” on a bill which would further enable the continued military campaign against the Palestinian people as a part of a campaign of “cherishing and respecting human rights” was never explained by Ocasio-Cortez. Perhaps her zeal for “cherishing and respecting” the rights of Palestinians, does not compare to her own political ambitions? Perhaps the “pressure” exerted by House Majority Leader, and ardent supporter of Israel, Steny Hoyer, was “too much” for Ocasio-Cortez to bear and “respecting human rights” had to take a back seat to the Israel lobby.

While the Iron Dome is frequently touted in the press and by politicians as a “purely defensive” missile system, the fact is the system allows the Israeli military freedom to launch “purely offensive” air strikes and artillery bombardments against Palestinian businesses, homes, farms and journalists. These weapons of war have been provided by the US government, which has propped up the Israel military as a front-line state for US imperialism, pumping over “\$243.9 billion in inflation-adjusted US foreign assistance between 1946 and 2019” according to usafacts.org, the most military aid the US has distributed to any country over the same time period.

With the Iron Dome system providing “defensive” capabilities, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was able to launch Operation Guardian of the Walls this past May, which resulted

in hundreds of Palestinian civilian deaths and thousands of injuries, while Israelis suffered less than 20. Nine days after the IDF operation commenced, United Nations undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator Mark Lowcock, commenting on the relentless air strikes perpetrated against the civilian population of Gaza, remarked, “There is no safe place in Gaza, where two million people have been forcibly isolated from the rest of the world for over 13 years.”

In a June 4 report, The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that the IDF operation had caused the displacement of over 72,000 Palestinians from their homes. The same agency estimated that during that period 256 Palestinians, including 66 children and 40 women, were killed in Gaza alone, with an additional 2,000 injured. In the occupied West Bank, 26 Palestinians were killed and roughly 6,900 injured.

Over the same period, in Israel, 13 people were killed, including two children and six women.

While the US government, with the overwhelming support of the both capitalist parties, is showering the IDF with billions to perpetrate a genocidal war against the Palestinians, US politicians, speaking for their big business and Wall Street backers, lament that there is a “labor shortage” and “no money” for pandemic-related social programs, such as federal unemployment assistance. These programs, along with a Centers for Disease Control eviction moratorium have been allowed to expire in the last month, even as the Delta variant of the coronavirus continues to spread unchecked and undetected throughout the US, leading to some 710,000 deaths so far.

In addition to ending pandemic-related unemployment programs, the Biden administration, which Ocasio-Cortez championed early this year as “totally reinvent[ing] themselves in a far more progressive direction” has escalated Trump’s war on immigrants, deporting over 600,000 this year alone.

Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA, far from opposing US imperialism, the American Gestapo at the border, or the profit-driven “herd immunity” response of the Biden administration to the pandemic, has worked hand-in-glove with the Democrats and trade unions to sow illusions that Biden and the Democratic Party are capable of reform.

In response to Ocasio-Cortez’s switch, thousands of social media users commented on her Twitter profile, expressing outrage that the self-proclaimed “socialist” who earlier this year condemned President Joe Biden and the Democrats for supporting Israel’s ethnic cleansing campaign, could so quickly reverse herself.

Whatever the political calculations Ocasio-Cortez considered that resulted in her switching her vote, the entire episode is a case study in bankruptcy of perspective espoused by the DSA: namely that the Democratic Party, the oldest capitalist party in the world, responsible for innumerable war crimes, is capable of being “pushed to the left” or reform.

This experience, in fact, proves the opposite, as the capitalist world order breaks down, the bourgeois parties, far from responding to popular opposition from below for social reform, will instead move further to the right.

As Ocasio-Cortez shows, despite all her “left” and identity-politics ridden language championing the rights of “black and brown people” when faced with an ultimatum from the party leadership—the same people her supporters elected her in the first place to fight—she buckled and refused to take a stand against the money spigot for the IDF. If Ocasio-Cortez is incapable of standing up to her own party on a vote,—which regardless of how she voted, was going to pass overwhelmingly—then how can one expect her to “stand up” to the Wall Street bankers and CIA operatives who actually run the party?

This is the logic of capitalist politics. There is no reforming the Democratic Party. It is a pillar of the capitalist world order, and its entire purpose is to serve the interests of the ruling class. Under conditions where the entire capitalist system is being revealed for what it is, breaking down under enormous class tensions and widening inequality, Ocasio-Cortez and the pseudo-left, instead of hastening its downfall, do everything in their power to sow illusions in the possibility of “reforming” it.

There is nothing socialist about the DSA, Ocasio-Cortez, or the Democratic Party. Those looking to actually fight the capitalist system need to make a class-conscious decision to break with the Democratic Party, and its pseudo-left appendages, and join the Socialist Equality Party.



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wswp.org/contact