

# Democratic Socialists of America congressman Jamaal Bowman votes for Israel's Iron Dome, visits with right-wing Prime Minister Naftali Bennett

Eric London

19 November 2021

The Democratic Socialists of America's congressional support for Israel's Iron Dome armament program is further confirmation that the organization is a faction of the Democratic Party, a supporter of imperialism and a facilitator of war crimes against the population of Palestine.

On September 24, New York Democratic congressman and DSA member Jamaal Bowman voted to provide the Israeli military with \$1.1 billion for its Iron Dome armament program in addition to the \$3.3 billion in Israeli military funding that Bowman previously voted for in July.

Hardly six months have passed since Israel launched a bombing campaign against the West Bank and Gaza, killing hundreds, injuring over 1,000 protesters and displacing over 70,000 people. During the two-week bombardment, Israel bombed 19 hospitals, dozens of schools, the al-Shati refugee camp, and the building housing the offices of the Associated Press, Al Jazeera, and other news agencies. By funding the Iron Dome, Bowman and the DSA are freeing up billions that the Israeli military will use to purchase the bombs, missiles and bullets it will use for its next war crimes.

Less than two weeks after his second Iron Dome vote, Bowman traveled to Israel as part of a Democratic Party delegation. Two years ago, Israel refused entry to two of Bowman's fellow DSA members, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar, denying them the chance to visit Tlaib's grandmother.

On his trip, Bowman visited with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, former chief of staff to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and present leader of the far-right Yamina Party. Bennett is a supporter of right-wing settlements in Palestine and has called for the annexation of sections of the West Bank. Earlier this year, Bennett pushed for passing apartheid laws stripping residency or citizenship rights for Palestinian spouses of Israeli citizens. In 2013, Bennett declared, "I already killed lots of Arabs in my life,

and there is absolutely no problem with that."

The Democratic visit was an integral part of efforts by Bennett and the Biden administration to present a friendly public face as they quietly turn the screws on Palestine by withholding aid desperately needed to provide food and COVID relief to the impoverished Palestinian working class. The trip was organized by the Democratic Party-aligned pro-Israel lobby group J Street. The organization's director, ex-senior Israeli government official Nadav Tamir, said the trip "expressed the important tie between the Democratic Party and the State of Israel" and included visits with representatives of the Israeli Defense Forces.

Shortly after Bowman's visit, a spokesman for the Palestinian Authority declared that the Bennett government is withholding funds for food relief on the false grounds that they would finance the families of terrorists. Denouncing the move, Palestinian Authority spokesman Nabil Abu Rudaineh told *Voice of Palestine* that "the current occupation government [of Bennett] has gone further than its predecessors with daily killings and war crimes."

Two days after the Democrats' visit to Israel, Palestinian officials told *YNetNews* that the Democratic administration of Joe Biden has been "stalling and misleading" the Palestinian Authority and withholding promised aid. "Everything that they promised evaporated, they didn't follow through on any of their pledges," the official said. Last week, the UN warned that there is "a rapid deterioration in the Palestinian economic & fiscal situation."

Bowman's visit served to provide international legitimacy as Bennett and the Democratic Party carry out their starvation strategy. After Bowman's meeting with Bennett, the prime minister personally thanked Bowman and fellow congresspersons for their vote to fund the Iron Dome and tweeted his appreciation for a "great meeting" in which the participants discussed "ways to strengthen the US-Israel

alliance.”

Bowman and Democrats also met with Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, who issued a statement “thank[ing] them for supporting the replenishment of the Iron Dome.” The visit took place weeks after Lapid and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken issued bellicose threats against Iran, with Lapid warning, “Israel reserves the right to act at any given moment, in any way.”

A number of rank-and-file DSA members have since called for Bowman’s expulsion, prompting a section of DSA’s leadership to issue public statements denouncing such calls.

One statement, titled “For Unity, not Unanimity: Palestine, Jamaal Bowman, and DSA,” has garnered dozens of signatures. The statement makes clear that “unanimity” is not required on such fundamental questions as opposition to imperialism and support for Palestine.

The statement denounces “the push to expel US Representative Jamaal Bowman from DSA” as “an undemocratic rebuke” and claims that many local branch resolutions calling for his expulsion “were passed without any debate or discussion.” Expelling Bowman would “be undermining DSA’s democracy and setting a dangerous precedent,” the statement reads.

The statement attempts to present opposition to Bowman as undermining workers’ struggles: “While workers strike, historic legislation fights for life, and the climate justice movement faces COP26, DSA leaders are forced to focus on an internal matter at the expense of external organizing. This will make our members and the public question who is DSA struggling against: the ruling class or itself.”

These are the cynical methods of the Democratic Party operatives who run the DSA. This effort to blame members for distracting from strikes and undermining organizational unity is aimed at stifling left-wing opposition to the Democratic Party and blocking the development of a movement against imperialist war. It mimics statements made by Ocasio-Cortez earlier this year to *Democratic Left* magazine attacking socialist criticism of the Democratic Party and Biden administration as “bad faith” and “privileged.”

A series of Democratic Party operatives with prominent positions in the DSA are joining this coordinated effort to suppress anti-imperialist criticism from within the membership. The DSA’s vice president, former DNC official David Duhalde, is one of many signatories of the statement, as is DSA member and New York Democratic State Senator Jabari Brisport.

Honda Wang, a former Democratic operative whose LinkedIn account notes that he worked for capitalist politicians “in both domestic and international accounts,”

said calls for Bowman’s expulsion are “silly” and that “few people think” the DSA’s own platform nominally opposing imperialist war “should be a litmus test.”

Former Ocasio-Cortez staffer Jonah Furman said opposition to Bowman’s Iron Dome vote “strikes me very much as a distraction,” adding, “The less time spent on this the better.” He said, “We don’t need—and will never get—political purity from our leaders, from our base, or from ourselves.”

This latest episode in the DSA’s involvement in the machinations of American imperialism is not an exception, but the rule.

In October, Bowman mixed identity politics with a defense of American war criminal Colin Powell, marking his death by tweeting, “As a Black man just trying to figure out the world, Colin Powell was an inspiration. ... Rest in power, sir.”

DSA member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez also refused to oppose the \$1.1 billion in additional funding, casting a “present” vote and pretending to cry in an attempt to save face. In 2018, Ocasio-Cortez walked back past statements criticizing Israel, telling PBS News “I am not the expert on geopolitics on this issue” and “may not use the right words.” DSA-backed Senator Bernie Sanders backed the 1993 intervention in Somalia, the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia, and the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. He also supported the latest \$1.1 billion in funding when the bill came to a vote in the Senate.

The DSA has deep roots as a cog in the machine of US imperialism. It was founded by Michael Harrington, who argued that socialist organizations must play “a pro-American, Cold War, State Department kind of role.” Harrington’s political mentor, ex-socialist Max Shachtman, was a supporter of the Korean and Vietnam wars. The DSA has functioned as a faction of the Democratic Party since the founding of its predecessor, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, in 1973.

It is possible the DSA’s National Political Committee will be forced to expel Bowman to save face. But this would not change the pro-imperialist character of the organization in any way. The actions of Bowman, Ocasio-Cortez and other DSA elected officials do not conflict with the history, program and class character of the DSA—they are entirely in line with it.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**