

24 hours after calling for negotiations to end Ukraine war, DSA and “progressive” Democrats demand escalation

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On Monday, 30 members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus sent a letter to President Joe Biden suggesting the US negotiate with Russia to bring an end to the war in Ukraine. The letter cited “the catastrophic possibilities of nuclear escalation and miscalculation” and expressed concern that the war is forcing billions of people worldwide to suffer loss of access to food and other necessities.

On Tuesday, with the “catastrophic possibilities” just as great as the day before, the Democratic signatories—including all four congressional members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)—withdrew their letter, repudiated calls for negotiations and pledged their full support for the war.

The reversal was immediate and total. In a statement published Tuesday, Caucus Chair Pramila Jayapal (Democrat-Washington state) called Monday’s letter “unfortunate” and apologized on behalf of the letter’s signatories for causing a “distraction” to the war effort. “The Congressional Progressive Caucus hereby withdraws its recent letter to the White House regarding Ukraine,” she stated. Not a single member of the caucus voiced any opposition to the reversal.

Jayapal did not merely withdraw the letter, she also committed the caucus to support the war until Russia is forced to capitulate. “Every war ends with diplomacy,” she wrote, “and this one will too after Ukrainian victory.” But according to the letter issued on Monday, if the Russian government lacks “a realistic framework for a ceasefire,” then the “risk of catastrophic escalation” will only grow. While the signatories wrote Monday that “the alternative to diplomacy is protracted war, with both its attendant certainties and catastrophic and unknowable risks,” on Tuesday they chose “protracted war” and accepted the risks.

Such is the reactionary dynamic of Democratic Party politics. This profile in political cowardice once again demonstrates that the Democratic Party, like its Republican counterpart, is nothing but a political pillar of American imperialism. It is a vehicle for prosecuting Wall Street’s reckless drive for world domination. Its “left” wing, represented by politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (Democrat-New York), is no exception.

These heroes of the upper-middle class “left” are scrambling over one another to erase their signatures from Monday’s letter asking for negotiations. In a transparently false attempt to blame her subordinates, Jayapal (who claims to be a supporter of the rights of employees against employers) ignominiously said the letter “unfortunately was released by staff without our vetting.”

Many signatories employed the same phrases to explain that they no longer support negotiations, as though they were reading from a common script. Mark Pocan (Democrat-Wisconsin) tweeted, “I have no idea why it went out now. Bad timing.” Sara Jacobs (Democrat-California) said, “Timing in diplomacy is everything. I signed this letter on June 30, but a lot has changed since then.” Ilhan Omar (Democrat-Minnesota), who was endorsed by the DSA, said, “Timing is everything in public policy, letters are written to respond to a moment and in politics moments pass in the speed of light. In this particular case, the letter was a response to intel we were getting on the war and the pathway forward.”

Omar’s allusion to receiving “intel” in briefings from the CIA and Pentagon is further proof that the pseudo-left is an arm of US imperialism which “responds” to the demands of the military-intelligence agencies. The “intel” Omar and the rest of the Progressive Caucus received in the wake of Monday’s letter was that they must

immediately withdraw it and reverse course, which they promptly did.

Hours after the letter's publication, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby thanked the congresspersons for their "very thoughtful concerns," but shut down their calls for negotiations, saying that only the Ukrainians get to determine "what success looks like and when to negotiate."

Then, on Tuesday morning, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (Democrat-California) obliquely referenced the Democrats' letter in comments to the press in Croatia, where she is holding meetings at the International Crimea Platform to mobilize Balkan leaders against Russia. "The support for Ukraine," Pelosi said, "will not stop. It is bipartisan, bicameral and it starts in the White House with our president." Pelosi, who holds the speakership solely due to her connections with finance capital, pledged that the Democrats would support the war "until victory is won," and repeated the far-right Ukrainian nationalist slogan: "Slava Ukraini!"

After having heard from the Pentagon and Wall Street, the Progressive Caucus carried out a 180-degree shift. Each of the self-proclaimed "socialist" signatories—Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush—capitulated without a peep of opposition. Ocasio-Cortez did not respond to a WSWS press request for comment on the matter.

The rapid silencing of the Progressive Caucus's letter is a conscious decision by the leadership of the Democratic Party to establish that it will not tolerate any expression of popular antiwar sentiment within its ranks in the lead-up to the midterm elections.

Within hours of the Monday letter's publication, the *Washington Post* published an editorial board statement titled, "This is no time to go wobbling on resisting Russian aggression."

The editorial begins by referencing statements by Republican House leader Kevin McCarthy earlier this month that a Republican Congress would not write a "blank check" for Ukraine and concludes by calling the original letter "unhelpful" and stating that Russia will use it for propaganda purposes. The *Post* editorial concludes: "The White House politely but firmly rebuffed the idea, as it should have. This is no time to go wobbling—and that goes for lawmakers in both parties."

Jayapal's Tuesday statement was careful to present the Democrats as unambiguously pro-war:

Because of the timing, our message is being conflated by some as being equivalent to the recent statement by Republican Leader McCarthy threatening an end to aid to Ukraine if Republicans take over. The proximity of these statements created the unfortunate appearance that Democrats, who have strongly and unanimously supported and voted for every package of military, strategic, and economic assistance to the Ukrainian people, are somehow aligned with Republicans who seek to pull the plug on American support for President Zelensky and the Ukrainian forces.

Not only does this pathetic capitulation heighten the danger of nuclear war, it also strengthens the fascistic Republican Party, which is gaining in the polls due to anger over inflation and will now be able to present itself, however falsely, as the opponent of war.

The Progressive Caucus' own letter on Monday linked to a poll showing that a wide majority of Americans are asking for negotiations to avoid a further escalation and that more Americans believe the US should reduce arms shipments versus those who believe the US should increase them. Polls repeatedly show growing popular concern over the mounting danger of a nuclear catastrophe. By rescinding even their milquetoast call for negotiations, the Progressive Caucus and DSA have handed Trump a gift on a platter, which he will exploit to drag the political system even further to the right.

The 24-hour turnaround shows that the development of an antiwar movement will only take place to the extent it is rooted in the working class and based on a fight against all the reactionary capitalist parties, including their craven pseudo-left apologists. This is the critical lesson which must be drawn from their capitulation.



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