

The bribery charges against Senator Menendez and the corruption of the Democratic Party

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The indictment of Senator Bob Menendez supplies another yardstick with which to measure the corrupt and reactionary character of the Democratic Party. The New Jersey Democrat long held one of the most powerful positions in the US Senate, as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He used it to both promote the interests of American imperialism, particularly in Latin America and the Middle East, and to amass a fortune for himself, signaled by the wads of cash, totaling \$480,000, and kilos of gold found in his house by federal agents.

At a press briefing Monday morning, Menendez declared that he would not resign from the Senate and suggested that the indictment was in retaliation for his long record fighting for the interests of New Jersey citizens and as a supporter of Democratic Party policies on the expansion of social programs and democratic rights. Why this would lead the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, appointed by Democratic President Joe Biden, to bring a false indictment the senator did not bother to explain.

His remarks were curiously limp, suggesting an official who is aware that he has been caught redhanded and has little likelihood of escaping from this indictment, as he did a previous corruption charge brought in 2015. That case ended in a hung jury and a decision by the prosecution not to proceed any further.

There is no innocent explanation for the stash of money, stuffed into jacket pockets and other locations throughout his home, or the gold bars, with the photographs spread widely by the media. The senator did not make reference to the gold bars—worth at least \$50,000 apiece—and his claim that he had accumulated nearly half a million dollars in cash through withdrawals from his savings account over the past 30 years is preposterous.

His statement that he kept the cash “for emergencies and because of the history of my family facing confiscation in Cuba” is a deliberate appeal to anticommunism, based on a flat-out lie. His family actually emigrated from Cuba in 1953, and Menendez himself was born in New York City on January 1, 1954, exactly five years *before* Fidel Castro and his guerrilla fighters marched into Havana. The senator wishes to justify his conduct by painting his family as a victim of Castroism and relying on widespread historical ignorance and a compliant media to get away with it.

Whatever the fate of Menendez in the present case, the exposure of his gross corruption shows the seamy side of a political gangster who is implicated in far greater crimes than those he was charged with last Friday. In his 30 years in the US Congress, Menendez has been a ferocious right-wing advocate for American imperialism, supporting US military interventions in Iraq, Libya, Syria and now Ukraine, as well as economic sanctions against Cuba, Venezuela, Iran and Iraq, which have cut off vitally needed medicines and other goods, contributing to hundreds of thousands of premature deaths.

He has stood on the right wing of the Democratic Party on many issues. During the Obama administration, he opposed the limited opening to Cuba which led to Obama’s visit to Havana, and he vociferously condemned the nuclear agreement with Iran. He was one of 10 signatories of a Senate letter urging the Trump administration to pressure Ecuador to renege on the sanctuary it had offered to Julian Assange at its embassy in London, an action later undertaken by the right-wing government of Lenin Moreno.

His relationship with Egypt is particularly revealing. Publicly, Menendez was a strident critic of the blood-soaked military dictatorship of Abdel Fatah el-Sisi,

denouncing its brutal repression in the 10 years since el-Sisi led a coup that overthrew the country's first elected president, Mohamed Morsi. Privately, he was on the payroll of the Egyptian dictatorship, through the three New Jersey businessmen named in the indictment.

Menendez was not just one of a hundred senators. As the senior Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he had considerable power to direct or withhold military aid to Cairo. As the *New York Times* explained it:

Before approving arms sales to most countries, the State Department's longstanding practice is to first informally notify the chairs and ranking members of the House and Senate panels that oversee foreign affairs. If those lawmakers do not sign off on the proposed transfers, the process is paused until the administration addresses their concerns.

Mr. Menendez has used this authority in recent years to block shipments of matériel to countries like Saudi Arabia and Turkey over human rights concerns. But the indictment indicates that Mr. Menendez, despite making repeated statements and even introducing legislative proposals denouncing Egypt over its rights record, was not using his power to force a reckoning over Egypt's military aid.

Egypt is the second-largest recipient (after Israel) of US military aid, at \$1.3 billion annually. This largesse, doled out for more than 40 years, since the infamous surrender to Israel by then-President Anwar Sadat, has helped build up the Egyptian military into the most powerful political and financial entity in the country. The main purpose of this vast build-up is to suppress the Egyptian working class, by far the largest in the Middle East, which rose up in a powerful revolutionary explosion in 2011, only to be betrayed by the unions, the social democrats, the Islamists and pseudo-left groups like the misnamed Revolutionary Socialists.

Menendez has also played an important role in the US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. He has been chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee throughout the war, approving the operations and budget of the State Department, which included substantial financial subsidies to the corrupt regime in Kyiv.

In October 2022, he called for stepped-up US military and financial support for Ukraine and intensified sanctions against Russia, declaring, "I pledge to use all means at my disposal to accelerate support for the people of Ukraine and to starve Russia's war machine."

Menendez has also pushed for a more radical break with the One China policy, which could rapidly lead to war in the Far East. He co-sponsored with Republican Senator Lindsey Graham the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022, which would designate Taiwan a "major non-NATO ally," a status similar to that of Japan, effectively giving it diplomatic recognition.

None of these positions are aberrations within the framework of the Democratic Party, and they largely correspond to the policies being carried out by the Biden administration as it seeks to maintain the dominant world position of American imperialism against potential rivals like China and Russia.

Nonetheless, pseudo-left groups like the Democratic Socialists of America and Socialist Alternative claim that it is possible to push the Democratic Party to the left by supporting politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. In response to the latest revelations, Ocasio-Cortez called on Menendez to resign. Sanders, observing the "courtesy" of relations within the Senate, has not yet done so.

The Democratic Party is a reactionary party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, and Menendez is one of its more repellent representatives. His likely political demise will only open the Senate doors to one or another ambitious lower-ranking New Jersey Democrat, including two who came to the House of Representatives directly from the national security apparatus: Andy Kim, former Iraq director for the National Security Council, and Mikie Sherrill, a former Navy helicopter pilot.



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