

Pelosi accuses anti-genocide protesters of being agents of Putin

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In toxic comments that combine equal parts political blindness and malicious slander, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi appeared on national television Sunday morning to declare that the widespread protests against Israeli genocide in Gaza were actually financed and promoted by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Pelosi was responding to a question by host Dana Bash on CNN's interview program "State of the Union," about whether young people, Arab Americans and "progressives" might stay home rather than vote for Biden in November, because of their hostility to US-Israeli actions in Gaza. This exchange followed, according to the transcript posted by the network:

PELOSI: Well, let me just say this, because I have been the recipient of their, shall we say, exuberances, and it's as recently as in Seattle on Thursday, unfortunately wanted to disrupt our very exciting Democratic meeting there. They're in front of my house all the time. ... So let's address that. But for them to call for a cease-fire is Mr. Putin's message, Mr. Putin's message. Make no mistake, this is directly connected to what he would like to see. Same thing with Ukraine. It's about Putin's message. I think some of these—some of these protesters are spontaneous and organic and sincere. Some, I think, are connected to Russia. And I say that having looked at this for a long time now, as you know.

BASH: You think some of these protests are Russian plants?

PELOSI: I don't think they're plants. I think some financing should be investigated. And I want to ask the FBI to investigate that.

Groups opposed to discrimination against Arabs and Muslims, like the Council on American-Islamic Relations

(CAIR), denounced Pelosi's comments. CAIR National Executive Director Nihad Awad said, "We are deeply disturbed by former House Speaker Pelosi's comments. Rep. Pelosi's claim that some of the Americans protesting for a Gaza ceasefire are working with Vladimir Putin sounds delusional and her call for the FBI to investigate those protesters without any evidence is downright authoritarian.

"Sadly, Rep. Pelosi's comments echo a time in our nation when opponents of the Vietnam War were accused of being communist sympathizers and subjected to FBI harassment. Hundreds of thousands of Americans, including many young people, progressive activists, and Jewish, Muslim, Palestinian, and Black Americans, have been protesting to call for a ceasefire in Gaza. Millions more Americans support a ceasefire, including the majority of Democrats, according to mainstream surveys."

But there was little reaction to Pelosi's McCarthyite smear in the major corporate media. The *New York Times* published a single brief news article, while the *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal* did not comment. Only CNN, the network where Pelosi had appeared, reported any negative reaction to her remarks, while the other broadcast and cable networks said nothing.

Pelosi made similar remarks in October responding to protesters who were outside her house demonstrating against the Gaza slaughter, shouting "Stop the genocide! Stop the holocaust!" One woman spoke directly to Pelosi as she entered her car, saying, "Democrats want the ceasefire." Pelosi can be heard yelling back, "Go back to China, where your headquarters is." (The protesters appeared to be white, not Asian).

Not one major figure in the Democratic Party has addressed these comments by someone who was the leading voice of the Democrats on Capitol Hill only 13 months ago. The Biden White House continues to reject appeals for a ceasefire while promoting attacks spearheaded by pro-Trump Republican fascists in the House against advocates of a ceasefire, particularly among college students, who have

been branded antisemites because they oppose the mass murder in Gaza.

It would be wrong to dismiss these comments as the delusional ravings of an 83-year-old who was notorious for inarticulate “word salads” even in her days as Democratic leader and House Speaker. (Pelosi stepped down as Democratic leader after the 2022 election, when the party lost its narrow majority in the House).

Whatever her limitations in public speaking, Pelosi was a forceful and deeply reactionary figure behind the scenes, with the closest connections to the top levels of the American state machine and its military-intelligence network. She was a longtime member of the House Intelligence Committee before becoming leader of the Democratic caucus, where she was part of the “gang of eight” congressional leaders regularly briefed about secret US military operations.

During her two separate terms as Speaker of the House, 2006-2010 and 2018-2022, she was second in the line of succession to the presidency, behind only the vice president, and played a key role in bipartisan collaboration, first with President George W. Bush, then with President Donald Trump.

When she told Dana Bash, “I say that having looked at this for a long time now, as you know,” she was suggesting that her decades of working with the intelligence agencies had convinced her that the Russian government—and apparently the Chinese as well—were intervening actively in American politics and were exploiting or actually creating the political divisions within the United States.

The claim that those participating in the protests against Israeli genocide in Gaza are being financed and manipulated by Moscow and Beijing is a reactionary McCarthyite slander. Pelosi would have imbibed such tactics at an early age. She was the daughter of a Democratic congressman from Baltimore, Maryland, and spent much of the 1950s as a student in a Catholic girls high school and college.

Pelosi has been particularly associated with anti-Russian and anti-Chinese provocations on behalf of the military-intelligence apparatus in the aftermath of the collapse of Stalinism.

She was one of the most fervent advocates of the Democratic Party campaign portraying Donald Trump as a stooge of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and in 2019 gave the green light to the first impeachment of Trump for his phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Trump was seeking compromising information on Democrat Joe Biden, and delayed US military aid to the Kiev regime briefly in order to put pressure on it. This threatened to undermine longstanding US plans, begun under the Obama administration, to turn Ukraine into a

spearhead against Russia.

As for China, Pelosi has long backed right-wing Chinese émigré groups influential in San Francisco’s Chinatown, one of the largest in the US. In one of her final acts as House speaker, in August 2022, Pelosi traveled to Taiwan, the highest-ranking US official to visit the island in defiance of the Chinese-American One China policy recognizing that Taiwan is part of China, and not a separate country.

A spokesperson for the congresswoman referred to this record in indirect terms in explaining Pelosi’s comments: “Informed by three decades on the House Intelligence Committee, Speaker Pelosi is acutely aware of how foreign adversaries meddle in American politics to sow division and impact our elections, and she wants to see further investigation ahead of the 2024 election.”

As a political smear, the claim that anti-genocide protesters are financed by Moscow and doing Putin’s bidding is a particularly crude one. While the Russian government has endorsed a ceasefire, it is hardly alone. In December, 153 members of the United Nations General Assembly voted in favor of an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. So have 67 members of the Democratic caucus in the House, including 13 members from California alone, as well as the City Council of San Francisco, where Pelosi lives.

In last week’s New Hampshire primary, 1,500 Democrats in New Hampshire wrote in “ceasefire” on their primary ballot, about 1.25 percent of the vote. This would equate, on a national scale, given 80 million Democratic voters, to about a million Democrats supposedly acting as agents of Putin.

The smear testifies to both the isolation of Pelosi, Biden and the rest of the Democratic leadership from the genuine feelings of millions of workers and youth, and to their mounting desperation over the clear unpopularity of the Biden administration’s actions, both in backing Israeli genocide in Gaza, and more broadly, in Ukraine and the Far East, wherever imperialist war is threatened.



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