

Jacobin and the DSA sow complacency to demobilize opposition to war against Iran

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The two days since Trump proclaimed a “ceasefire” have been characterized by continued violence in the Middle East, above all, through Israel’s massive bombardment of Lebanon, and a deepening political crisis in the United States. Trump has paired his ceasefire announcement with open threats of renewed war against Iran, declaring Wednesday night that the US military is “Loading Up and Resting” for its “next Conquest.”

Under these conditions, the Democratic Party and the organizations in its periphery are working to cover up the central political lessons of these events.

The pseudo-left publication *Jacobin*, closely linked to the Democratic Socialists of America and the Democratic Party, has responded with a series of articles whose central theme is: There is nothing to worry about, and nothing needs to be done.

The complacency of Ben Burgis’s article is summed up in its headline: “On Iran, Trump and the American Empire Blinked.” Burgis writes: “Trump backed down. In doing so, he showed something that it’s going to be important to remember next time hawks tell us some new war is going to be an easy victory: even global military and economic juggernauts have their limits.”

Summing up his analysis, Burgis concludes that “one of many reasons not to go around the world starting wars of choice is that sometimes you *lose*. Next time hawks try to promote some new American adventure overseas, ask them why they’re so confident that it won’t go like ... well ... this.”

This argument lays bare both the political orientation of the DSA and the conclusions that flow from it. Burgis is not addressing workers and young people seeking a way to oppose imperialist war through mass struggle. He is appealing to sections of the political establishment, urging them to draw more prudent conclusions from a military and strategic setback.

This standpoint conforms entirely to that of the Democratic Party, which is never mentioned in what passes for Burgis’s “analysis.” The Democrats accept the fundamental strategic aims of the war even as they

occasionally criticize Trump’s rhetoric and methods. As Democratic Senator Chris Murphy told CNN on Wednesday, “But if Iran has the Strait permanently now, then what, what an error, what a miscalculation this entire endeavor was.”

Bound up with the Democratic Party politics that permeate *Jacobin*’s article, its central purpose is to demobilize opposition to war: Trump has suffered a “debacle,” therefore the danger has supposedly receded. It is certainly the case that American imperialism has suffered a major setback and catastrophically misjudged the resistance of the Iranian people. But the Trump administration’s response will not be retreat but escalation—greater violence abroad and a deepening conspiracy for dictatorship at home.

Burgis’s treatment of Trump’s genocidal threats is particularly revealing. He quotes Trump’s social media post on Tuesday morning—“A whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again. I don’t want that to happen, but it probably will”—but handles it with a joking flippancy, remarking that it “would have sounded implausibly extreme if a comic book writer had put it in the speech bubble of a mad scientist or costumed supervillain.”

The conclusion is one of utter complacency:

If the war had been going better, he would have simply kept doing what he was doing. When it didn’t, he resorted to the most outlandish threats he could think of. When that too failed, he agreed to negotiate on deeply humiliating terms.

The thrust of this argument is that Trump’s threat to annihilate Iran was merely “outlandish” and not in deadly earnest. Burgis makes this explicit when he writes, “Even the vast power of the world’s dominant empire has limits. His initial genocidal bluster was itself downstream of this reality, as was his subsequent capitulation.”

Jacobin’s dismissal of Trump’s threat as “genocidal bluster”—that is, empty threats that won’t be acted on—stands

in contrast even to sections of the state itself. Retired General Barry McCaffrey, for example, noted that Trump's language amounted to "code words" for the use of nuclear weapons. Burgis, moreover, does not make the elementary point that threats, and the war as a whole, are a flagrant violation of international law.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned, Trump's threat was a historical watershed. His declaration that the United States was prepared to annihilate an entire civilization of more than 90 million people exposed the war's genocidal logic and laid bare the criminal character of the American state. It shattered what remained of the myth that US imperialism acts in defense of "democracy" or "human rights."

Such considerations are entirely foreign to the politics of *Jacobin* and the DSA, which are oriented entirely to the electoral fortunes of the Democratic Party and the prospects for political advancement (and personal enrichment) this affords.

While Burgis says nothing about the Democratic Party, another article, written by Branko Marcetic, notes that some leading Democrats, including Murphy, have shifted overnight from denouncing Trump for advocating war crimes to attacking the ceasefire deal as a capitulation to Iran and "effectively baiting Trump into restarting hostilities."

Marcetic calls such criticism of Trump from the right "distinctly unhelpful," but adds, "Thankfully, this is not the case with all Democrats, some of whom, like Representative Yassamin Ansari, favor sense and reason."

He makes no mention of the DSA members in Congress, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Greg Casar, or those supported by the DSA, like Senator Bernie Sanders, who have focused their "opposition" to the Iran war on appealing to congressional Republicans to restrain Trump's actions. "Now is the time for [Congressional] Republicans to speak up," as Sanders put it in response to Trump's genocidal threats.

While these "left" Democrats issue rhetorical criticisms of Trump's actions in Iran, they were in full support of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, initiated by the Biden administration.

Marcetic's own conclusion is, if anything, even more politically bankrupt than Burgis's. He states that the ceasefire is "not really a victory for the forces of peace" but only "a stunning defeat for militarism," and then argues that "to make any peace stick, we will all have to help [Trump] maintain the fiction that he won, bigly." Making "peace stick" becomes a matter of pop psychology. If only Trump can be convinced that he "won," the war will not be resumed.

The central aim of the Democratic Party and the DSA is to

prevent the emergence of a movement from below, which would not stop with opposition to Trump. The Democrats fear any genuine popular mobilization because it would immediately raise broader questions: the grotesque concentration of wealth, the dictatorship of the financial oligarchy, and the entire social order that both capitalist parties exist to defend.

This is why, during the "No Kings" protests against Trump held on March 28, they and their political affiliates deliberately downplayed the war against Iran. Those like Sanders who did raise the question of the war offered no way forward for the struggle except appeals to Congress and even to Trump himself.

What is entirely absent from the *Jacobin* articles is any reference to the historical roots and fundamental driving forces of the war against Iran. There is not a word about the strategic interests of American imperialism, the long history of US intervention in Iran under both Democrats and Republicans, or the connection between the assault on Iran and the expanding conflict with Russia and China. Neither article mentions "oil," "imperialism," "capitalism," the ruling class or the social forces represented by Trump.

This omission expresses a definite class standpoint. *Jacobin*, speaking for the Democratic Party and the upper middle class milieu represented by the DSA, seeks above all to block the emergence of an independent movement of the working class against war and the capitalist interests from which it arises. Such a movement, *Jacobin* has stated elsewhere, constitutes "sectarianism."

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party fight for the building of a mass anti-war movement based on the independent political mobilization of the working class against the capitalist system, which is the root cause of war. Only the international working class has the social power to halt the imperialist war machine and prevent the present crisis—or the next one—from developing into a world war that would threaten civilization not only in Iran but everywhere.



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