

Mamdani hosts Trump, Trump threatens “annihilation” of 90 million Iranians: The DSA as an appendage of American imperialism

Joseph Kishore
23 September 2026

On Monday, Zohran Mamdani, the most prominent elected official of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), hosted Donald Trump at Gracie Mansion. On Tuesday, Trump went before the UN General Assembly and threatened to “annihilate the Islamic Republic” of Iran and “drive them into hell.”

The sequence has a precedent. Mamdani’s last meeting with Trump, at the White House, came two days before the administration launched the war against Iran. The chronology says everything about the political character of the DSA. It is not an opponent of American imperialism. It is an appendage of it.

Trump’s threat against Iran is the language of Hitler, a threat of genocide against a country of more than 90 million people. It is in and of itself a war crime. It came amid gloating (“to the victor belong the spoils”) over the plunder of Venezuela, whose president was seized by American forces earlier this year and now sits in a federal prison in New York.

Mamdani said nothing about Iran when he spoke alongside Trump on Monday. Iran also went unmentioned in a sympathetic, 22-minute interview afterward with CNN’s Christiane Amanpour. Explaining his alliance with Trump, Mamdani said that for all their differences, “we have one thing that brings us together, which is the love of New York City.” Since Tuesday, the mayor of the largest city in the United States has said nothing about a threat to exterminate a nation.

This is not an oversight. Mamdani’s silence on Iran is a political position. It expresses the DSA’s acceptance of, and support for, the global aims of American imperialism.

In the CNN interview, Mamdani called Netanyahu “a war criminal” and said the International Criminal Court’s

warrant for his arrest should be honored. Yet he embraces Netanyahu’s chief sponsor and protector, who by any rational legal standard should be arrested for war crimes himself. The denunciation of Netanyahu is a fig leaf for his supporters. The embrace of Trump—would-be dictator and actual mass murderer—is Mamdani’s real politics.

The DSA is a faction of the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street and the Pentagon. The Democrats’ criticism of Trump’s foreign policy has never been that it is too aggressive. Their complaint is that it is not aggressive enough against Russia. When the House voted this month on the Lindsey Graham sanctions bill, Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries (who Mamdani has backed as the next House Speaker) opposed it because it did not go far enough, declaring that one must “confront the bully, not appease the bully.”

This position is shared by the DSA and the entire pseudo-left milieu around it. The DSA’s two members of Congress, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, voted for both the \$40 billion Ukraine war package in 2022 and the \$61 billion package in 2024. At the Socialism 2026 conference in Chicago earlier this month, organized by Haymarket Books and endorsed by the DSA, panels on foreign policy presented support for the US-NATO war against Russia and for conflict with China as “anti-imperialism.” One speaker complained that American support for Ukraine before 2022 had been “extremely limited.” Speakers passed over the Ukrainian state’s honoring of Nazi collaborators implicated in the Holocaust.

The DSA’s political lineage runs back to Max Shachtman, who broke with Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International in 1940. Under the pressure of bourgeois

public opinion, he refused to defend the Soviet Union against imperialism. Within a decade, Shachtman was supporting the American war in Korea. He went on to back the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and the war in Vietnam, and to place his followers in the anti-communist apparatus of the AFL-CIO.

Michael Harrington, Shachtman's protégé and the founder of the DSA, carried the same essential politics into a new organizational form. The American left, he held, must play "a pro-American, Cold War, State Department kind of role," and he was a lifelong supporter of Israel. In 1973, he founded the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee on the program of "realignment" within the Democratic Party, the "left wing of the possible," with the possible defined at every point by the ruling class. In 1982, DSOC merged with the New American Movement, a remnant of SDS, to form the DSA.

There is another part of Trump's speech that was highly significant. The Cuban government, which he said "would fall," has "cultivated ties to subversive and radical groups such as the Communist Party USA, Antifa and the Democratic Socialists of America." Trump was restating the State Department's Cuba report of July, which treats the DSA, the Communist Party, the National Lawyers Guild and Code Pink as extensions of Havana. Antifa has already been designated a "terrorist organization." To name the DSA beside it is to declare its activities could also be criminalized.

In response to this direct threat, Mamdani has said nothing. Jacobin has published nothing. The DSA's only formal reply to the charges remains its statement on the State Department report in August, which pleaded that "[Trump's] report admits that DSA does not organize on behalf of the Cuban Government."

Nor has the DSA offered any public statement on the meeting at Gracie Mansion itself. The closest thing to one came from Grace Mausser, co-chair of DSA's New York City chapter, who told Politico: "Most people within DSA understand it's a strategy and that Trump is a very sensitive and petulant person who receives any perceived slights in unpredictable ways. It's very risky not just to Zohran himself but to the entire city to insult him directly."

It is difficult to imagine a more groveling statement. Trump's "unpredictable" responses include threatening a nation of 90 million with annihilation and branding his political opponents as terrorists. The DSA's answer is not to oppose him but to take care not to upset him. It is the

logic of the courtier. The tyrant is sensitive, so he must be flattered.

Trump's real fear is not the DSA. The capitalist oligarchy has taken the measure of people like Mamdani and Trump knows what he is dealing with. The target of Tuesday's tirade is the working class, the social force whose shift to the left has found a distorted initial form in the DSA's electoral successes. Millions of workers and young people are coming into opposition to war and oligarchy and drawing the conclusion that capitalism itself is the problem.

The conduct of Mamdani and the DSA cannot be explained merely by the personal opportunism and general swinishness of the individuals involved. It has a class basis. The DSA speaks for privileged sections of the upper middle class, whose comfortable position depends on the stability of the capitalist order and the global dominance of American capitalism. They want a larger share of the spoils to be had at home. They have no quarrel with how the spoils are acquired abroad.

Nor will their craven opportunism necessarily save them. Mamdani now basks in the glow of Trump's smiling villainy. Three weeks before their first meeting, Trump called him "a 100% Communist Lunatic." Earlier this month every House Republican voted to declare the DSA's ideology "incompatible with American values and the United States Constitution." When the political winds shift, Mamdani can be vilified as quickly as he has been embraced.

The fight against imperialist war cannot be waged through the DSA. It can only be waged in opposition to it, through the independent political mobilization of the working class, in the United States and internationally, against both parties of Wall Street and the capitalist system that produces war and dictatorship. That requires a genuinely socialist and internationalist leadership: the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact