

A dictatorial move: Trump blocks travel to Israel by two congresswomen

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The Israeli government's decision Thursday to bar a visit to Israel and the West Bank by US congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar is an authoritarian attack on democratic rights, carried out at the direction of US President Donald Trump.

This was not a decision taken in Jerusalem, but an action dictated to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by Washington. It was a decree by the US chief executive, directed against two critics in the legislative branch, in complete violation of US constitutional norms.

On Thursday, President Trump denounced the prospective visit by Tlaib and Omar in a tweet filled with his brazen lies. He claimed the two representatives "hate Israel & all Jewish people, & there is nothing that can be said or done to change their minds." He warned, "It would show great weakness if Israel allowed Rep. Omar and Rep. Tlaib to visit."

The Israeli inner cabinet, meeting a few minutes later, got the message. It reversed a previous decision and decided to bar Tlaib and Omar from entering either Israel or the territories it occupies, such as the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

What brings Trump and Netanyahu together is not merely the relationship of imperialist paymaster and stooge regime, important as that is, but a common political strategy. Both are seeking to prop up crisis-ridden right-wing governments by making common cause with fascist elements in their respective countries—for Netanyahu, the settlers on the West Bank and sections of the military, for Trump, the white supremacists, co-thinkers and inspirers of the El Paso gunman.

The Israeli media has already noted the brazen hypocrisy of Netanyahu denying entry to Omar and Tlaib when he has effusively welcomed right-wing anti-Semites like Hungarian Prime Minister Victor

Orban and Italian Deputy Prime Minister—and would-be Mussolini—Matteo Salvini.

The chain of events has ominous implications. The president of the United States has no authority over members of Congress, which under the Constitution is a co-equal branch of government. No US president has ever before sought to bar travel by senators or representatives.

Last month, Trump unleashed a diatribe against Tlaib, Omar and two other representatives, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressley, denouncing them as "socialist" who "hate our country." He declared that all those who criticize the government "are welcome to leave. If they don't love America, tell 'em to leave it."

The attack contained the threat that any critics of the policies of the US ruling class should be forcibly deported. Trump has now moved to bar these same individuals from traveling freely as is their right under international law. The next move could very well be to attempt to prevent them from coming back into the United States.

As for the Democrats, they could barely summon enough energy to condemn an unprecedented constitutional violation directed against two of their own representatives in Congress. The statement from House Speaker Pelosi was typical, beginning with a declaration of her love for Israel, and calling herself "deeply saddened" over actions and statements that were "beneath the dignity of the great State of Israel" and "beneath the dignity of the Office of the President."

In March, the Democrats in the House introduced a resolution tacitly condemning remarks by Omar which were critical of Israel and the Israel lobby in the US, opposing such criticisms as "anti-Semitic" and capitulating to the right-wing witch-hunt against a fabricated growth of "left-wing anti-Semitism." The

House ultimately passed a modified version of the resolution.

The filthy *New York Times*, semi-official publication of the Democratic Party, published an opinion article by Michelle Goldberg on March 8, attacked Omar for having “invoked” anti-Semitic “tropes,” including that “Jews employ semi-occult powers to control world events; they manipulate hapless gentiles with their money; and Jews in the diaspora are disloyal to the countries in which they live.”

This follows a common pattern. In one episode after another throughout this year, Trump has defied constitutional norms, with the Democrats working at every point to cover up the significance of the administration’s increasingly authoritarian measures.

In December, Trump engineered a partial shutdown of the federal government in an effort to force Congress to provide funds to build his wall along the US-Mexico border. When this blackmail failed, Trump reached an agreement to reopen the government and promptly declared a state of emergency on the border, claiming that as a basis for transferring funds, appropriated by Congress for other purposes, to pay for the wall.

Trump fired his secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and lower-ranking DHS officials because they balked at mass raids into immigrant communities. DHS and numerous other federal agencies are headed by “acting” officials appointed by Trump but never confirmed by the Senate, undermining the legislative oversight provided by the Constitution.

The Democrats have responded to Trump’s fascistic attacks on immigrants by passing in late June a \$4.6 billion border bill to fund the administration’s concentration camps, followed by the passage of the administration’s budget bill, providing a record \$738 billion for the US military.

The administration went forward with a provocative plan to change the official Fourth of July festivities in Washington from a non-partisan holiday into a militaristic ceremony celebrating his role as “commander-in-chief.” The Democrats responded by largely hailing Trump’s message of “unity” in his Fourth of July speech, while criticizing the administration for “politicizing” the military.

Throughout the initial months of the 2020 presidential campaign, Trump has made repeated

suggestions that the 2020 elections should be canceled—because of his supposed massive popular support—or that he could seek a third and fourth term in the White House, defying the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution which limits any president to two four-year terms.

Trump has clearly decided to base his political strategy on these three themes—racist vilification of immigrants and minorities, glorification of the military and police, and anti-communist diatribes against socialism—which are combined in a distinctly fascistic appeal, both for the 2020 election campaign and for whatever political crisis ensues.

The actions of the Trump administration do not merely spring out of the head of Donald Trump. They are an expression of the profound decay of democratic forms of rule in the United States, produced by unprecedented social inequality and unending war. Opposition will not come from the Democratic Party, but in the mobilization of the working class against it and the entire capitalist system.

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