Will Omar's PEACE Plan Bring Peace?

written by Steve Leigh | March 18, 2020

Rep. Ilhan Omar put forward the Pathway to PEACE (Progressive, Equitable, and Constructive Engagement), a package of seven bills to move U.S. foreign policy in a progressive direction on Feb. 12. Ironically it has the support of right-wing isolationists. Many peace activists support it. Code Pink has launched a campaign to win support.

Omar has come under horrific, racist attacks from the Trump administration and other right wingers. Trump led chants at his rallies of "Send them back!" about "the squad," four progressive congresswomen of color including Omar who oppose Trump's agenda. Ironically, three of the four were born in the U.S. and are citizens by birth. Omar is a naturalized U.S. citizen originally from Somalia. Trump's attacks are part of his racism and opposition to human rights in general and immigrant rights in particular.

Ilhan Omar has also been attacked for her support of Palestinian rights. She has been denounced as anti-Semitic, as have many Palestinian rights activists including other members of "the squad." In fact opposition to Israeli apartheid and support for Palestinian rights is not a sign of hatred for Jewish people–just as opposition to apartheid in South Africa was not a sign of hatred against white people. Many Jewish people have come out strongly in opposition to the Israeli occupation and for Palestinian rights. Groups such as Jewish Voice for Peace are prominent in the movement for Palestinian rights. Opposition to Zionism and Israeli apartheid is a political position, not a racial or religious one.

Omar needs to be defended from these right wing and Zionist attacks. She should have the right to state her position without fear of racist and reactionary political attacks and the physical threats that have been issued against her.

Her position on Palestine as well as her general attitude to U.S. foreign policy, has led her to put forward the Pathway to PEACE. However, she has also been condemned for her lack of criticism of the Turkish government under Erdoğan.

Generally, she wants to move U.S. foreign policy toward a more peaceful, less aggressive and domineering stance.

Omar states her rationale up front:

> *"The United States has a proud history as a leader when it comes to democracy, human*

> *rights, international institutions, and the rule of law. Following World War II, our country led the world in establishing the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."*

Rep. Omar may feel that appealing to American patriotism is a way to win support from her colleagues. Unfortunately, the above quoted underlying assumption of the new Pathway to PEACE distorts the actual U.S. record. Far from defending human rights, the U.S. has promoted its own corporate and military interests. To preserve its alliances, maintain control of resources and ensure cheap labor to corporations, it has consistently opposed labor rights and human rights generally. It has supported right wing military dictators and other repressive regimes. It has intervened in foreign elections. It helped overthrow or tried to overthrow the governments of Iran 1953, Guatemala 1954, Cuba 1961, Vietnam 1963, Brazil 1964, Dominican Republic 1965, Chile 1973, El Salvador 1979, Nicaragua 1981-90, Grenada 1982, Venezuela 2002, Iraq 2003, Honduras in the 2000s and Bolivia in 2019. The result of *all* these actions was to undermine democracy and limit human rights. These are just *some* of the most outrageous U.S. actions. The rest of its foreign policy was consistent with these exemplary actions.

The human rights rhetoric of the U.S. government was primarily a ideological weapon against the "Communist" bloc. Internally, the U.S. government did not even challenge the wholesale deprivation of human rights to its Black population until the Civil Rights movement–20 years after its proclaimed support for international human rights.

Omar's plan supports multilateralism as opposed to Trump's America First unilateralism. She hopes that multilateralism will be less aggressive than unilateralism. But multilateralism is not necessarily more progressive. If many imperialist powers support a goal , it is as likely to be as bad as if only one did. She also says that the use of force should be the "last resort." In other words, Omar doesn't exclude U.S. wars abroad. This unfortunately contradicts her desire for peace.

The key aspects of her plan are as follows:

- Give Congress more control over sanctions
- Reduce support to "abusive" countries
- Transfer $5 billion of military funding to create a Global Peacebuilding Fund
- Require the U.S. to join UN agreements on children's rights, migration and International Criminal Court;
- A robust international deal to address the massive displacement of people around the world.

The first three proposals will make little change at all. They rely on the same or similar officials making better decisions based on better nominal principles. For example, why would a Global Peacebuilding Fund run by the State Department achieve something different than the State Department does now? Giving Congress more of a say over these issues might give more pressure points for anti-war activists. However, there is no guarantee that a Congress that is run by Democrats and Republicans, parties committed to big business, would make decisions that contradict the desires of big business around the world, The fourth proposal relies on the UN which is the agent of the major imperialist powers. The last proposal relies on the good will of governments to reach and enforce treaties. The record of the climate treaties should be enough to make people skeptical about the route of treaties.

The point is that imperialist governments are always up to no good on the world stage. Anti-war activists should not suggest supposedly better ways for those governments to intervene. No matter its rhetoric, the U.S. will always intervene for bad reasons and with bad results. Activists should

demand an end to military and economic intervention. Not better, smarter, nicer sanctions, but no sanctions! Not Congress-approved “last resort” wars, but no wars. Not diplomacy over war, but no military *or* diplomatic intervention. The left’s most successful involvement on foreign policy was the anti-war movement over Vietnam. It was a multifaceted movement with many different strands. But it largely came together to demand all U.S. troops out of Vietnam. It targeted one specific deployment of troops. Whether we won could be verified. It did not rely on good intentions. This is the model we should use: “Out Now!” not “ Negotiate Now.”

In spite of the professed aims of Omar’s initiative, we should resolutely reject its rationale and reject those parts of it that call for “better” U.S. military, economic and diplomatic intervention. Even if it passed this plan will merely whitewash the motives of U.S. intervention without changing its substance. We can defend Omar from racist and reactionary attacks without supporting her Pathway to PEACE which would not achieve her objectives

U.S. military intervention around the world hurts people in the U.S. as well as those bombed or occupied. It kills people at home and abroad. It diverts resources from vital needs such as health care, education, housing, and infrastructure. As more and more people organize to oppose attacks on immigrant rights, women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, and to demand Medicare for All, higher minimum wages, Black Lives Matter and action against global warming, we have more ability to build an anti-war movement. All these problems flow from the same source–capitalism. When people see these connections the anti-war movement will become stronger. The stance that the anti-war movement takes is very important for its success or failure.

As long as U.S. capitalism exists we will need to oppose its imperialist interventions. Anti-war activists should demand the closing of U.S. bases around the world. This would be a concrete step in weakening imperialism. Those who want to promote human rights and peace will need to organize for the complete elimination of imperialism and the capitalist system it is based on.