



Taibbi: The Brutal Comedy Of The Withdrawn Peace Letter

Description

It doesn't happen often, but sometimes, one wishes something wasn't quite so funny. The world this week needed a political maneuver pulled off with no laughs, and an influential group of American politicians (with one admirable exception) proved unable to accommodate.



Clockwise from left: the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Vice-Chair for Policy Jamie Raskin, and Chair Pramila Jayapal

The Congressional Progressive Caucus **took about 36 hours to pull off a circular firing squad** stunt that would have made the Keystone Kops stand and applaud:

On June 27th, analyst Christopher Mott at The Institute for Peace and Democracy published a white paper called, "Woke Imperium: The Coming Confluence Between Social Justice and

Neoconservatism.” You might remember it. It was featured here in a *TK* article called “The Great Military Rebrand,” and Chris and I did a Callin show about his thesis.

One of Mott’s central ideas was that Americans imagine they don’t fight wars for crass reasons of conquest or regional self-interest. They prefer grand battles of good and evil, part of a worldview that places “universalist narratives at the center of the human story.” Enemies are therefore cast not as mere competitors for resources or territory, but agents of Satanic influence:

Foreign rivals... can be painted as being “on the wrong side of history”, “against Progress”, “diabolical”, and so on... At the same time, these very causes are likely to be systematically de-emphasized in the cases of nations allied to the U.S—such as Saudi Arabia...

Three days after that paper was published, the Congressional Progressive Caucus, led by chair Pramila Jayapal of Washington, began circulating an anodyne letter calling for diplomacy in Ukraine. Addressed to President Joe Biden, the signatories urged a “proactive diplomatic push, redoubling efforts to seek a realistic framework for a ceasefire.” They were not calling for a cessation of military support. Instead, they wrote that because “the risk of nuclear weapons being used has been estimated to be higher now than at any time since the height of the Cold War,” and “nuclear escalation and miscalculation... only increase the longer this war continues,” Biden and the Democratic Party should at least explore a diplomatic solution.

The signatory list read like a *Who’s Who* of the House’s most Twitter-adored progressives, including New York’s Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Missouri’s Cori Bush, California’s Ro Khanna, Minnesota’s Ilhan Omar, and (please take note) Maryland’s Jamie Raskin. Several members, including Ocasio-Cortez, would eventually come under pressure from some leftist/antiwar constituents for appearing to support the expansion of the war effort.

The letter circulated for months, but wasn’t released until this Monday, October 24th. Though the press release on the CPC website opened with a line about the increased threat of nuclear war, it went on to frame the call for diplomacy in pragmatic political terms, citing a poll from the liberal Data for Progress outfit from September 27:

*The majority of voters also support this call for diplomacy. Recent polling shows that 57 percent of Americans approve of U.S. negotiations to end the war in Ukraine as soon as possible, **even if it means making some compromises with Russia.** 57 percent believe that Russia’s war in Ukraine will end in a negotiated peace, not a total military victory for either side, and 59 percent largely agree that the U.S. has a leading role to play in negotiating an end to the war.*

There’s no time when the letter wouldn’t have been politically complicated, but the timing was a little more painful for the signers for a few reasons. Speaker Nancy Pelosi was due to speak the next day in [Zagreb, Croatia](#), where she’d promise at an international summit “our support is here to stay.” Meaning: if Democrats retain control of Congress after midterms, they will continue weapons shipments.

Moreover, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy the week before [said](#) the opposite, that “people are

gonna be sitting in a recession and they're not going to write a blank check to Ukraine." Leading House progressives laying hands on the same political Twister squares as hated Republicans must have been deemed an unacceptably awkward visual.

With the kind of speed only possible in the Twitter age, the 30 signatories found themselves right away bot-bombed and fighting off accusations of collaborationism and fascist sympathy. So they did what nearly all intellectuals do when confronted with fleeting unpleasantness: they turned their faces completely inside out and renounced their own statements *en masse*.

The story critical of the "Jayapal 30" first came out via a *Washington Post* article appearing at 1:34 p.m. Monday and hit Twitter two minutes later. By 2:16 p.m. another prominent Democrat, Arizona's Ruben Gallego, triangulated fellow members, castigating, "The way to end a war? Win it quickly."

The way to end a war? Win it quickly.

How is it won quickly? By giving Ukraine the weapons to defeat Russia.

<https://t.co/EJEwif3VJj>

— Ruben Gallego (@RepRubenGallego) [October 24, 2022](#)

By 10:53 p.m., one of the letter's signatories, Wisconsin's Mark Pocan, went on Twitter and [wrote](#), "This was written in July & I have no idea why it went out now. Bad timing." By that same time late Monday, several who'd signed the document were telling reporters they'd been blindsided, not informed when the letter was to be released.

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