**Precursors to war**

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Since President Trump took office in 2017, the leadership of the Democratic Party has overwhelmingly supported the precursors to today’s dangerous US escalation towards Iran: sanctions, proxy battles and a bloated military budget.

Yet, now that we stand on the brink of a possible US war of aggression, Democratic leaders are feigning concern that Trump is leading a march to war without congressional approval, and using a faulty strategy to do so. These objections, however, are grounded in process critiques, rather than moral opposition – and belie Democrats’ role in helping lay the groundwork for the growing confrontation.

The US drone assassination of Maj Gen Qassim Suleimani, the commander of Iran’s Quds Force and a ranking official of the Iranian government, takes confrontation with Iran to new heights, inching the US closer to the war the Trump administration has been pushing for. While Trump deserves blame for driving this dangerous escalation, he did not do it on his own.

As recently as December 2019, the House overwhelmingly passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2020 with a vote of 377-48. Two amendments were stripped from that bill before it went to a vote: Rep Ro Khanna’s (D-Calif) amendment to block funding for a war with Iran barring congressional approval and Rep Barbara Lee’s (D-Calif) amendment to repeal 2001’s ‘Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists’ (AUMF).

That AUMF effectively allows the government to use “necessary and appropriate force” against anyone suspected of being connected to the 9/11 attacks, and has been interpreted broadly to justify U.S. aggression around the world. Officials from the Trump administration have suggested that the 2001 AUMF may give them authority to go to war with Iran.

Of the 377 Representatives who voted for the $738 billion defense bill, 188 were Democrats. Just 41 Democrats opposed the legislation. The bill cleared the Senate with a tally of 86-8, with just four Democrats voting against it. None of the Senators running for the 2020 Democratic nomination were present for the vote. Before the vote, Sen Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky) took to the Senate floor to brag about the fact that “partisan demands” had effectively been removed from the bill and declared that “sanity and progress” had won out. “Reassuringly, the past few days have finally brought an end to bipartisan talks and produced a compromise NDAA,” said McConnell.

At the time of the bill’s passage, 31 organizations, including Yemeni Alliance Committee and the National Iranian American Council Action, put out a joint statement condemning the NDAA as a looming disaster destined to be abused by the Trump administration.

“The NDAA is a massive blank check,” reads the statement. “The authorization of $738 billion is obscene. Further inflating the Pentagon’s overstuffed coffers does not make us safer – it perpetuates a system that treats military intervention as the solution to all world problems.” Despite these concerns, Democrats did not put up much of a fight, and the Congressional Progressive Caucus declined to whip the vote against the NDAA.

Democrats’ complicity doesn’t stop with bloated war budgets. In July 2017, Sen Bernie Sanders (I-Vt) was the only lawmaker in both the House and the Senate who caucuses with the Democrats to vote against a bill that bundled together sanctions on Iran, Russia and North Korea. Proponents of the bill, meanwhile, used anti-Russia rhetoric to ram it through Congress. Sen Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif) told the Intercept at the time, “I just looked at the sanctions, and it’s very hard, in view of what we know just happened in this last election, not to move ahead with [sanctions].

Excerpted from: ‘To Stop Trump’s War with Iran, We Must Also Confront the Democrats Who Laid the Groundwork’.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org