Bernie and the Squad surrender to the war machine's Ukraine scam

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Max Blumenthal (MB): We just had a very momentous vote in the Senate in Washington last week, and they voted to give lots of your money, if you're an American citizen and you're watching this or you're in the US and paying taxes, a lot of your money to the Beltway bandits, to the so-called intelligence community, which is neither communal nor intelligent, to the national security state and to defence contractors to build more McMansions in suburban Northern Virginia and bring more gentrifiers into Washington to live in these loft style drone boxes that are popping up everywhere around the city. It's $40 billion to Ukraine, but not going much of it won't go to Ukraine, it goes straight back here. And it is military Keynesianism fuelling the kind of economy that has cropped up since 9/11, a permanent war economy. The defence budget is over $800 billion a year. Biden has proposed a record defence budget and the Ukraine proxy war has replaced Afghanistan as the justification to meet all of the bureaucratic priorities of the national security state. It is a disgusting and scandalous aid package framed by mainstream media as a simple measure to quote unquote help Ukrainians. It will not help any Ukrainian unless those Ukrainians all want to die in a lost cause, fighting to maintain a nationalist and oligarchic post Maidan regime in Kiev with missiles, advanced missile systems pointing at Moscow. It is an aid package that ensures the US goal or advances the US goal of fighting to the last Ukrainian, but seems to do nothing for US national security. And we would expect some resistance to this bill, wouldn't we? We would expect resistance from the kind of people who say that they oppose corruption, that they oppose bloated defence budgets, that they oppose inequality. And yet the opposition came from the "America first" crowd. It came from figures like Marjorie Taylor Greene and Matt Gaetz, who outflanked from the antiwar left the Squad, the Progressive Squad, self-proclaimed socialists like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar and Jamaal Bowman, who has proclaimed that he's against colonialism and white supremacy, sending weapons into the arms of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, into the arms of the neo-Nazi Aidar battalion and other bloodstained paramilitary war criminals like the Georgian Legion, which
has been filmed executing wounded Russian soldiers in the field. The Squad voted for all of this, and they will not explain their votes to the public. And in the most upsetting instance of capitulation before the war state, Bernie Sanders, Senator Bernie Sanders, self-proclaimed socialist, voted for the $40 billion. Before I bring in Aaron, let's just play a clip that I think sets the background for Bernie Sanders rolling over before the war state and not only caving to it, but advancing one of the most pernicious narratives that's helped lead us to the point we're at today in this Ukraine proxy war.

**Bernie Sanders in Video:** Mr. President. I rise to speak about a matter of extraordinary importance to the future of American democracy and, in fact, democracies all over the world. At the Helsinki summit on Monday President Trump embarrassed our country, undermined American values, and openly sided with Russia's authoritarian leader, Vladimir Putin, against US intelligence community's unanimous assessment that Russia interfered in the 2006 presidential election.

**MB:** He is cited: against the intelligence community, says Bernie. So, Aaron, what's your reaction to Bernie Sanders voting to this $40 billion? Did you expect him to do it?

**Aaron Maté (AM):** Based on clips like that, I should have expected it, but I was shocked. I couldn't believe it because this is such an easy case. Build Back Better has been completely sidelined. Now a massive package with no debate is being rushed through to fund the military industrial complex, intensifying the US role in a proxy war. Bernie Sanders has always claimed to be antiwar. He voted against the Iraq war, that's what helped distinguish him in the 2016 and 2020 primaries from his opponents. So, no, I did not think- and this is me being naive- that Bernie would go and vote for this huge gift to the military industrial complex and this huge escalation of a very dangerous proxy war. I did not think Bernie was that craven, but I was wrong. And the fact that he went along with Russiagate for so many years, even though Russiagate was used to destroy him and everything he cares about. I mean, let's recall how Russiagate began. You know 2016 should have ended the Hillary Clinton wing of the party. They lost to a reality TV show host and they were caught conspiring against Bernie Sanders. Bernie was poised to take the reins to present voters with a genuine alternative to the fake populism that Trump had given them, tapping into discontent over a failed neoliberal system. And also the Clinton wing was caught plotting against him. So there was no need for him to pretend to play nice. But what did he do?! When the Clinton campaign and their allies came up with the Russiagate scam, as we talked about earlier, Bernie, instead of calling it out, he played along with it. And instead of focusing on the contents of the emails that showed massive corruption and bias against him, Bernie played along with the Hillary Clinton campaign's narrative that it was Russia that did it, and that's what we should be concerned about. To the point where he introduced that resolution, you played the clip of it, of him going on the Senate floor. And that resolution, it basically would force Senate members to accept the claims of the US intelligence community, even though, of course, those claims have since been shown to be incredibly dubious and I think completely false. But basically,
he was so committed to propping up the narrative of the people that tried to destroy him, that he introduced a measure that would force people to basically pledge their loyalty to those allegations and the intelligence official who generated them. So no surprise now that the latest iteration of Russiagate is the Ukraine proxy war. I mean, there's a direct link between using Russiagate to box in Trump. To whatever extent he was serious about getting along with Russia, Russiagate was very successful in undermining that. Lindsey Graham and John McCain, you know, went to Ukraine in late 2016 and vowed that 2017 will be the year of offence. And one of their top priorities was getting Trump to authorise weapons shipments to Ukraine that Obama would not send because Obama apparently didn't want to further inflame the proxy war that he started and also didn't want to arm neo-Nazis. And with Trump facing allegations that he's a Russian asset, showing that he's willing to send weapons to Ukraine was a great way to dispel that. And so he did. He did send those weapons and that helped escalate this proxy war and bring us to the state that we're in today. And so Bernie Sanders played along with this from the start. And so no surprise, I guess, that he's now going along with it, even when it means, you know, at the worst end of the many catastrophes that have come from this Ukraine proxy war, even if it means a nuclear holocaust, he's even willing to take that risk if he can show his fidelity the Russiagate narrative. It's set.

MB: Yeah well it's infuriating. Shows you where the US left is. I mean there was a lot of bellyaching on the US left amongst a lot of like left influencers over Gaetz and Marjorie Taylor Greene standing up and issuing these bold statements denouncing the $40 billion as a money laundering scam that will only escalate the insane proxy war while the Squad went along with it. And it really shows kind of like the dead end politics of the US left, because they're so focussed as particularly the DSA, the Democratic Socialists of America, on endorsing candidates and getting behind candidates who will run as Democrats and go into Congress and then advance their agenda. And what did they get? They got a rubber stamp for the war state as the DSA issued a pretty good statement on the need to abolish NATO and NATO's malignant, malicious role in fuelling conflict in Eastern Europe. And so it's just words from the DSA and when it comes down to it, the people they endorse, who are still members of their organisation like AOC, I think Chris Hayes is also a member of the DSA, they don't get kicked out, they don't do anything to them. So as long as they're continuing to see the Democratic Party as a host body for their socialist delusions or their socialist dreams, this is what they're going to get. Meanwhile, you can say whatever you want about these America first characters. I mean, some of them are just cartoonish, but they're actually representing...

AM: They voted against baby formula. They voted against...

MB: Yeah. I mean, they voted against a bill to, you know, subsidise baby formula as they were complaining that the government wasn't spending money on baby formula, diverting it to Ukraine. So there's hypocrisy there, too. You can say what you want, but at least they're trying to represent their constituents and the GOP base. That's something the Democrats
never do. In the UK, you have Jeremy Corbyn, who is still principled and is standing up against NATO and its push for World War Three, a conventional war with Russia. And he's been branded, I think, Vladimir Corbyn by Boris Johnson today. I mean, he was a target of the British and US security state. Mike Pompeo promised to push back against Jeremy Corbyn. He promised a British audience, as CIA director, that we will push back against Corbyn if he's elected. Like we promise to meddle in your so-called democracy. We will take out your leader on your behalf. So don't worry. If so, that's what Bernie Sanders is trying to avoid. I don't know what he thinks he's getting in exchange because he ain't doing shit.

**AM:** But Max, what did he get in exchange when he catered to Russiagate throughout the Trump administration? What did he get? He got Russiagated. That's how they rewarded his servitude. In the 2020 primaries, when it was time for Bernie to run again, Bernie got Russiagated and on the eve of the Nevada caucuses, anonymous intelligence officials leaked claims that Vladimir Putin was trying to install Bernie and that led to a frenzy of media attention. And everyone, of course, in the media went along with it, even though, of course, no details were provided about what the supposed Putin plot was to elect Bernie. It doesn't matter, because as long as Russia is invoked, it is, you know, whoever the target is, the media will go after them. And Bernie, that helped sink his campaign. I think voters got the message that, Oh, wait, like Russia wants Bernie. And we've been told for five years that Russia is the cause of all our problems. So we don't want Bernie. That wasn't the only factor, but it was a factor, I think. And that's what Bernie got for being a loyal servant of the Russiagate narrative. He got Russiagated himself. And maybe you want to play the clip of when you asked Matt Duss, Bernie Sanders foreign policy adviser about this because it's such a window into the attitude of these people that even when they're being undermined, they're being directly sabotaged in a transparent scam, they go out of their way to declare their deference to it. It's unbelievable. This was in February 2020. And Max, you asked Matt Duss, Bernie Sanders foreign policy adviser, about why they weren't pushing back on this or why they weren't demanding evidence?

**MB:** Yeah, this was at the launch of the Quincy Institute, which was sort of a think tank that was being proposed as an alternative to the pro-war think tanks on K Street. And Matt Duss was participating in a panel with a top foreign policy adviser to Joe Biden. So I got the mic. And here's what I said.

**MB in Video:** I also heard that Bernie said that Russia was interfering for Bernie Sanders. And the campaign's response has been to, in the words of Ro Khanna, trust the intelligence agencies, including apparently people who operate clandestine and clandestine fashion. Why doesn't the Bernie Sanders campaign ask for the evidence? Why hasn't there been a demand to see the evidence and make public the evidence? And what are the consequences of continuing to play defence when this Russiagate narrative won't go away?
Matt Duss in Video: You know, Russian interference, you know, as has been reported in, and the senator has said he was briefed on this question. He was briefed convincingly. He made...

MB: Hold on- one more time...

Matt Duss in Video: He was briefed convincingly...

AM: You know, Max, it's pretty quiet on my end. If there's a way to raise the volume? Maybe that's just me, but...

MB: That's just Matt Duss. So Matt Duss said that- we'll just paraphrase: Matt Duss, you know not the most charismatic person here and he I think was a little bit nervous. But basically they're saying that Russia- it was such an obvious, you know, kind of psyop to paint Bernie as a Russian asset. And what they did was they dumped, the security state dumped in The Washington Post some phoney assessment that the Russian government and the Kremlin was trying to help Bernie Sanders. And the whole point was to catch Bernie on the tarmac coming off a plane: And what do you say about this intelligence community assessment that Russia is trying to help your campaign? Basically, that you are the Trojan horse for Putin? And Bernie is like: I have repeatedly denounced Russia and I'm against Vladimir Putin's authoritarianism and, you know, the pathetic defence. And then you can see he's irritated, but he's being told by his staff not to counter the press the way Donald Trump did. They're like, you don't want to seem like Trump because we're you know, we don't like that. We like NPR stuff. And so, Bernie, as he's walking off- I didn't have the clip ready- he said, oh, you're from The Washington Post, of course, it makes sense. And what he's saying is you are the paper of the CIA and this is what you do. But he's not going to retaliate. So then I put it to Matt Duss, like why don't you ask the intelligence so-called community to make this public? And he said, well, we just trust their assessment. So this is the guy... go ahead.

AM: Well, he says in the clip the senator was briefed convincingly.

MB: Yeah, briefed convincingly. Okay. I'm convinced that I'm a Russian Trojan horse. It's fine. Destroy me. I just want to be Senate budget chairman anyway. And, you know, that's who I am. I like the Senate. I don't want to fight. I don't want to fight. I've got millions of young people out there in the street thinking that I'm going to, you know, make college free and cancel their student debt. I've got their hopes up, but I don't actually want to fight because when it comes down to it I want to go back to the Senate and my house in Vermont and I'd be left alone. I don't want to be fighting like Corbyn. So that's Bernie. And as his advisor, Matt Duss, comes from the Centre for American Progress, which is just the trash can of neoliberalism. I'd actually forgotten, Aaron, that Neera Tanden existed. But I think there should be some kind of celebrity boxing match between her and Nina Jankowicz of like Biden administration rejects. Because she was also rejected for a position because she was just too malicious, had made too many enemies. But she was the head of the Centre for
American Progress and what she successfully did was rake in a ton of money from arms manufacturers like Lockheed Martin and Company, as well as Israel lobbyists and corporate America; Google, the Walton family, to fund the place where the future Democratic leadership would cool their heels. And Matt Duss was there for many years at the Centre for American Progress. He was a writer for ThinkProgress, and there was an interesting episode that took place, or a very illuminating episode that took place while he was there that I was pretty close to because I knew all the targets of this. ThinkProgress's writers, Eli Clifton, Zaid Jilani, Ali Ghareeb, they were all targeted by the Israel Lobby, by AIPAC, because they were doing a lot of work on the lobby's plans to push a war with Iran. And they were exposing a lot of the lies coming out of the Israel lobby and the mainstream media. And so they targeted them and Neera Tanden was approached by Israel lobbyists and their cut-outs in Congress, Barney Frank, his sister, Ann Lewis, and they basically told him, fire all these guys. So they fired them all except Matt Duss. And it was because Matt Duss wasn't willing to fight. He basically said, I'm going to go along with the priorities of this institution. I'm not going to fight you on this issue. And then he eventually got elevated somehow to Bernie's Senate staff and became the lead of his foreign policy team. And now we see what Bernie is doing. Aaron, Matt tweeted something about Henry Kissinger and they attacked Henry Kissinger from the right. I mean, I never thought I would see this. Remember when Bernie was always attacking Hillary Clinton because she said Henry Kissinger was her foreign policy guru. So Henry Kissinger comes out and says, you're going to have to basically negotiate a way out of this conflict in Ukraine because it's destroying Europe. It's totally destroying Europe's economy and destabilising the region. Stop flooding it with weapons. Henry Kissinger, I mean, he is a realist. And so here's Matt Duss's response: "Folks, if your 'anti-imperialism' leads you to nod along with Henry Kissinger, it might be good to step back and take a moment". And I don't think that's what anyone was saying, like, Oh, Henry Kissinger is going to, like, you know, lead our next socialist anti-imperialist Marxist-Leninist reading group, no, no one was saying that. They were just saying, if Henry Kissinger says this, then maybe there's a chance for an opening at some diplomacy. Aaron, what's your reaction?

**AM:** Well, the alternative, I mean, if you want to play guilt by association, he's nodding along with George W. Bush, the Cheneys, the entire leadership of the Republican Party, every single neocon think tank, every single neocon in Washington, basically. So that's who he is lining up with. And the point is, what's damning about this is he's now positioning himself to the right of Henry Kissinger. He's more pro-war right now than Henry Kissinger. So if that's the position that he wants to put himself in, then, then so be it. But look, this is why, I mean, he's come out and said that Biden's position on Ukraine is the responsible, progressive position. That's a direct quote from Duss. So this is our leftist opposition right now. It's people who are completely on board with a proxy war.

**MB:** And what is that responsible position, it's the position of Victoria Nuland, the wife of Project for a New American Century co-author Robert Kagan, arch neocon. It's the position of Tony Blinken, who is the Secretary of State. I don't know how many days he's gone
without talking to his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov. But there's been no diplomacy. He's anti diplomacy. The $40 billion was about extending the war to prevent the so-called off ramp for Putin that would allow for a negotiated settlement here.

AM: And by the way, what was Kissinger's proposal that Matt Duss was taking issue with?! Kissinger basically said that Ukraine should make territorial compromises in territory where it's already clear that the majority of the population in the territories he's talking about doesn't want to live under Ukraine. That's why there's been a Donbass war, because people rose up in 2014 because they didn't want to live under a coup government that was waging a war on their identity. So Kissinger is saying in Crimea, which Russia seizes in 2014, in which the entire political spectrum of Russia is supported, including Navalny, in Russia that's like universally accepted and cheered that Russia did that back then because Crimea is seen as so vital to Russia's security. And where the majority of the population is, polls have shown even if you forget the referendum, and you think that that was completely rigged, which I don't think it was, but even if you think that, polls show the majority of Crimeans want to live under Russia. And that's what essentially Kissinger was saying, is that in areas where you have people revolting against you anyway, where there has been a war for the last eight years, you should give that up if you want to avoid destroying your country, which to me seems like a pretty reasonable position.

MB: It should be the position of the diplomatic corps and the Department of State. But that's not where we are. Where we are is that this war could spread to Transnistria, in Moldova, Poland could enter and attempt to subsume parts of western Ukraine. It could spread in any number of directions when, as you said, Aaron, it's completely obvious that Crimea will remain a part of Russia and that the population of much of eastern Ukraine, particularly Lugansk and Donetsk, wants to be independent of the anti-Russian Maidan regime, which is now engaged in a campaign of brutal repression against ethnic Russians, against leftists, communists, human rights advocates, anyone who dissent. It is illegal to publicly question the Ukrainian war effort in Ukraine under direct orders from Vladimir Zelensky, who is just celebrated and cheered on by his true natural constituency, the global predator class gathered at the World Economic Forum in Davos. So we're still a prisoner of these warmongers who want to continue this war indefinitely and entertain fantasies of retaking Crimea and the entire Donbass and basically occupying that entire population instead of granting them the independence that Crimea voted for in 2014, and which Donetsk and Lugansk obviously want. I don't know what's so frightening about that? What's so bad about that? Instead, they want to bring Finland and Sweden into NATO and fuel conflict on Russia's northern borders and have a conflict around the Arctic. It's terrifying. And you would hope I mean, this is why I went out on Capitol Hill- I guess I should get out there again- and started grilling members of Congress early on as this conflict escalated into all out war after February 24th and got Ro Khanna on the record where he just sounded like a Reaganite, Reagan era neocon. He sounded like he was on Team B from the Reagan administration. He's like, We're the greatest country in the world, and we need to fight for freedom and, you know, be a shining city on
the hill. I'm like, I thought you were supposed to be Bernie Sanders successor, but maybe that is what it takes to be Bernie Sanders successor in a Democratic Party, that really is the party of war whose base is more pro-war, according to a new University of Maryland poll overseen by pollster Shibley Telhami. More Democrats favour a no fly zone in Ukraine than Republicans currently. So, Aaron, I guess I don't really have an answer to this question, but the question is, where does the anti-war movement go when the politicians they've gotten behind have turned their backs on it?

**AM:** I can't answer that question either. But it's so depressing because, you know, when we came up there was the Iraq war. That was an exciting time. I mean, both of us were there right here in New York City, where I am, at the RNC and that was massive. And that was a real time. And the idea of anything approaching a fraction of that now is just a pipe dream. And, you know, Obama did a great job of killing the anti-war movement, and Russiagate has done an additionally great job in killing it, because it's made being a progressive or a liberal, it's somehow made that intertwined with worshipping the national security state and worshipping all of its various imperatives and claims. So that's very tough when even people who previously like Barbara Lee, you know, who voted against the war on terror, she's also voting in lockstep for the Ukrainian proxy war.

**MB:** I should've had that clip ready of Barbara Lee, where she said she voted for this because Russia is spreading disinformation. She told MSNBC. What does Pelosi have on these people? Like what could she do?

**AM:** It's a great question.

**MB:** And Jacobin said at some point they will have to stand up against this. At some point the Squad will have to stand up. Like, no, that's what they are and you continue to support them. And that was like Branko Marcetic, he spent the rest of his day attacking Jimmy Dore and you know, it's pathetic. It's pathetic. I'm done with them. You know, the progressive movement, this is the culmination of the progressive movement. This is it.

**AM:** Well, I hope they turn around. You know, I want to make a point about the territorial aspect of the Ukraine war, because it's important. If people like Matt Duss and whoever else don't like the prospect of Ukraine giving up territory to Russia as a result of to end this war, what they should have done for the last eight years is join Vladimir Putin and the Russian government in supporting the Minsk accords, because Minsk, if implemented by Kiev, which it wasn't, would have kept Ukraine's borders intact. It would have kept those breakaway areas in Donetsk under Ukrainian control, just giving them some limited autonomy where basically they could essentially veto Ukraine's membership into NATO. That's essentially what Minsk was. It would have given these breakaway republics autonomy, but kept them within Ukraine's sovereign borders. Now, Crimea is a different story, but again, it's been obvious since 2014 that it was never going back to Ukraine after the coup. Crimea was seized in
response to the coup. But Russia for the last eight years has been promoting the Minsk accords and that's why when the breakaway areas were asking Russia to incorporate them and to recognise their independence Russia didn't, because Russia was trying to stick to the terms of the Minsk accords. But it was the US which refused to put any pressure on its client government inside Ukraine to implement Minsk that has a huge amount of responsibility for it not being implemented. So if you don't like the outcome of where Russia takes even more of Ukraine's territory now, you should have been there promoting the Minsk accords during the last eight years of war when, by the way, there's a lot of suffering going by. A lot of people dying, which we're not supposed to talk about, but that actually happened. So if you don't like the outcome now, then you should have joined the Russian government back when its stance was actually recognising Ukraine's borders within the Minsk formula, which is now no longer the case. That opportunity has gone.

MB: It seems to me that the goal all along or the agenda was to use Minsk and somewhat in the same way that the Israelis used Oslo, which is to just establish new facts on the ground and keep treating the ethnic Russian population of Donetsk and Lugansk as, you know, target practise. And they thought that they could just get away with it and that there would be no penalty, there would be no accountability. And Russia's invasion, Operation Z, is just reality crashing through. All of a sudden, they encounter a powerful country that is actually willing to hit them back. The US was not. This is just something the US wasn't accustomed to. I mean, it sanctions Syria to death, causing electricity crises around the country, occupies one third of the country. There's very little that the Syrian military can do against the US or Israel, which is constantly attacking it. Iran is not going to directly intervene at this point. So the US thinks it can get away with it just as it got away with Iraq and so on. And here, reality just breaks through. And it's a country that is a major energy provider and a provider of potash fertiliser that can crash economies across Europe with the flip of a switch, the entire economic war against Russia so far, I mean, there will be long term consequences and there are major ricochet effects, as a new UN report illustrates across the Global South, but so far has failed. The ruble is better than at its pre-war level and Europe is facing a dark winter without fuel, without adequate fuel and without enough fertiliser to grow food. And as we see in the US, the stock market is crashing. I just got an email from Merrill Lynch telling me they're pulling out all their EU investments because of the energy crisis there, which is brought on by this proxy war. And Biden can no longer plausibly use the phrase the Putin's price hike. Nobody's buying it.

AM: It wasn't a hit. For some reason, it didn't take off.

MB: No. I wonder, you know, if someone was fired for that. It was pretty disastrous.

AM: No, I'm sure they got promoted.
MB: Yeah, well, and then inflation is at the top of everybody's concerns right now. I don't care what, like, Democrats or Progressives say, it's a real issue. And that's the reality we're in. And this reality is going to play out in the midterms and it's going to play out in 2024. I don't know where it will lead, but we're staring reality in the face in a way we haven't before.

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