

# **Medea Benjamin, the pro-Putin “left,” and the far right in America**

Anonymous

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**edist.ro editor's note:** while we do not endorse every sentiment in this article nor find every conclusion to be comprehensively proven, we are grateful for this post's outline of Medea Benjamin (and her allies') increasing convergence with fascists.

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The world crisis revolving around the war in Ukraine has a deep influence in US politics. This makes understanding that war all the more important.

In January, the fascist-linked Republican Party will take power in the US House of Representatives. They will use this power to try to stop US aid to Ukraine. That is primarily because they are politically in line with Putin, who is the Number One centralizer and leader of far right forces in the world. This includes chauvinists, religious fanatics, all manner of bigots and even outright fascists.

Incredible as it might seem, these far right Republicans will be joined in their effort to aid Putin by a wide layer of the supposedly socialist "left". Up until now, this left has been more or less irrelevant and without any real influence. That may change as Representatives like Marjorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert and similar types wield real influence. They will be aided in their efforts by getting a left cover and these "lefts" may gain a real influence. That is why it is important to understand who they are, their connections (including their financing) and what they are saying.

One of the more prominent of these "lefts" is Medea Benjamin, leader of the so-called peace and justice group Code Pink. Benjamin co-authored a book on Ukraine and she is now touring the country doing book events. At a recent event, her co-author was told by Ukrainians that what he was pushing was "pure Russian propaganda". They were right.

Benjamin and Davies' book tells you all you need to know about her view of and approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Bill Weinberg did a thorough review of that book.

Weinberg cites one falsehood or misrepresentation after another. For example, Benjamin and Davies pretend that the referendums for independence in the fake Donetsk and Luhansk "republics" were legitimate votes. They make much of the presence of US military advisors in Ukraine but never mention the presence of the Russian Wagner Group and similar forces there. They call the 2014 uprising a "coup". They picture Donbas and Crimea as legitimate parts of Russia (as in "if they [Russia] were going to have to fight to defend Donbas and Crimea" as if those regions are part of Russia). The authors in effect deny Russian war crimes in Ukraine by denouncing "the corporate media [for]... amplifying allegations of serious Russian war crimes in Bucha and Mariupol."

Weinberg also points out that there is not a single mention in the book of Putin's repeated statements that Ukraine has no right to exist as an independent country.

Elsewhere, Benjamin puts the entire blame for Putin's invasion of Ukraine on the supposedly U.S. driven expansion of NATO, which according to Benjamin is a threat to Russia. One needn't be a supporter of either the US military nor NATO to understand that this expansion eastward was driven by the Eastern European nations themselves; they were the

ones who took the initiative out of fear of a Russian invasion. Like most of the rest of the western left, Benjamin fails to mention this.

Benjamin pictures the issue of Ukraine and Russia through Russian eyes. “That’s how people in Russia see Crimea,” she says at one point in that same video. How people in Ukraine see the matter doesn’t enter the equation. Nor does Benjamin mention that the majority of people living in Crimea had voted for independence back in the referendum of 1991. She clearly supports Russian annexation of Crimea in this video.

In another video presentation, she worries about a “constant escalation” from both sides, as if it isn’t a matter of one side defending itself from an imperialist invasion. She equates the two sides “hardening their positions.” The invasion, itself, was a “tremendous mistake”, not a crime or anything of the sort. Nor does Benjamin ever refer to the massive war crimes that the invaders are committing. She uses the threat of nuclear weapons to call for negotiations and urges Blinken and Lavrov to discuss with each other “every week”. This can only mean negotiating Ukraine’s fate over the head of Ukraine itself.

Weinberg’s conclusion to his book review can serve as a summary of Benjamin’s approach: “Benjamin and Davies even expend much ink arguing against sanctions on Russia—so they support no pressure on Russia whatsoever, neither military nor economic. But they implicitly call upon readers to pressure Ukraine to cede territory to Russia, which essentially means selling out the inhabitants of those territories to persecution, deportation and likely massacre and genocide. And these supposed leftists are explicitly on the same side on the question as the Defense Intelligence Agency, the New York Times editorial board, the paleocons, and the MAGA Republicans. This book is dishonest propaganda which is loaded with distortions and inaccuracies, on virtually every page, and OR Books should be roundly condemned for having published it.”

## **The Wider Context: Iran and Syria**

Benjamin’s position on Ukraine must be understood in two contexts. The first is her relationship with the regime in Iran, which she supports. That support has its political origins in her view of the 1979 overthrow of the Shah. Benjamin wrote a book about that revolution called “Inside Iran” that was published in 2018.

In it, Benjamin reviews the 1979 revolution. She pictures the seizure of power by mullahs as being almost inevitable, but what she entirely leaves out is the rise of the workers’ councils, or “shoras”, which could have been an alternative power center. How and why they did not develop along these lines is a deeper question and it relates to the role of Stalinism. While important, that is outside the scope of this article.

Benjamin cannot uncritically endorse the Iranian regime, so instead she supports its “reformist” wing. As for the 2017 protests in Iran, she says they have succeeded in “opening up opportunities for women, invigorating the electoral system, loosening the dress code, creating more government transparency, fighting corruption, making the judicial system more accountable, decreasing the death penalty...” But she concludes that the overthrow of the

regime is impossible. “A nonviolent process of transformation from within [the regime] is really the only option,” she writes.

Benjamin also reviews the Iranian regime’s role in the Syrian revolution, which she refers to as “internal strife”. She writes, “It is still unclear how peace will come to war-torn Syria... As of early 2018, however, Syria’s future was being decided by Russia, Turkey, and Iran.” Once again, the role of the working class masses – this time the Syrians – is entirely absent from Benjamin’s calculations.

In their book on Ukraine, Benjamin and Davies blame the war in Syria on US arming Muslim fundamentalist groups. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the US carried out a consistent bombing campaign against exactly these groups.

In recent years, Benjamin and Code Pink have led a series of Iranian state supported tours of Iran. In 2018, a group of about 25 socialists, feminists and other activists signed on to an open letter to Code Pink, criticizing one such tour. We pointed out the number of different protests, labor strikes, etc. ongoing at that time. “We are alarmed that while you will be hearing the position of the repressive right-wing government in Iran, you evidently have no plans to hear from any of the progressive opposition forces mentioned above. That can only mean that the end result of your visit will be to help legitimize this right-wing, repressive and reactionary regime,” the letter wrote.

Sure enough, that was exactly the result, as the Iranian regime publicized the tour to pretend they were getting widespread foreign support. But Benjamin and Code Pink were unapologetic. The Code Pink delegation met with the “modern” and US educated Iranian foreign minister, Javad Zarif. According to Code Pink’s own report of that meeting, they asked not a single question about human rights in Iran nor about the Iranian regime’s murderous participation in the war in Syria. A few weeks after this meeting, the courageous human rights lawyer and fighter for women’s rights in Iran, Nasrin Sotoudeh, was sentenced to 33 years in prison and 148 (!) lashes. By their failure to raise her case when they met with government officials, Code Pink and Medea Benjamin must bear some responsibility for that sentence, as well as for the repression of the regime in general.

In a follow-up interview on KPFA radio, Benjamin had scarcely a word of criticism for the Iranian regime. And the only opposition to that regime that she mentioned was the MEK, which she correctly labeled as being connected with the US government, thereby leaving the impression that the only internal opponents to the regime are US inspired.

Benjamin and Code Pink place the entire blame for the disastrous economic situation in Iran on US sanctions. However, in a discussion with the Ukraine Socialist Solidarity Campaign, long time socialist feminist and Iranian-American activist Frieda Afary disputes this. According to her, the overwhelming cause of the economic collapse is the corruption plus the bloated military spending of the regime.

Today, Benjamin and Code Pink are more or less silent on the ongoing Iranian revolution. Or rather, it would be better if they were entirely silent. After massive Iranian government repression of the ongoing protests, Code Pink put together an online petition related to the protests: “We are concerned about the protests in Iran in the aftermath of the murder of Mahsa Amini and we demand the US lift the brutal sanctions that harm millions of Iranian women every day,” they wrote. They couldn’t get away with ignoring the repression alto-

gether, although they couldn't even outright condemn the murder of Mahsa Amini, never mind the hundreds of others. The only issue for them is the US sanctions.

This should be compared to the chants at the weekly rallies of Iranians and Iranian Americans in the San Francisco Bay area. There, the chants/call backs include: "What do we want? Regime change in Iran!" and "What's the solution? Revolution!" Not a word about the sanctions neither in the chants nor in the signs held up.

It is inescapable that Benjamin and Code Pink are defenders of the Iranian dictatorship. They cover this support by pretending that internal reform is possible and will resolve the problem. They are the moderate or "reasonable" supporters of the Iranian dictatorship. As with Ukraine and Syria, Code Pink and Medea Benjamin are deaf to the masses of Iranian people.

## **The Wider Pro-Putin "left"**

On Nov. 19, Benjamin appeared in an event in New York City (and also on the internet) called "The Real Path to Peace in Ukraine" . The event was organized by People's Forum and ANSWER Coalition. Benjamin spoke along with a host of other big names, ranging from Noam Chomsky to Vijay Prashad. Benjamin's position was that the war is a "proxy war" between the US and Russia. Nothing she said should have been a surprise. She dismissed the idea that the invading army can be defeated "on the battleground". In this context, she called for negotiations, and a "Christmas truce". These statements combined can only mean that the Russian invaders be allowed to annex further parts of Ukraine. As with the other speakers at this event, not once did Benjamin refer to the massive war crimes the Russian invaders are committing. Nor did she ever refer to what the Ukrainian people might want. That is par for the course for Benjamin.

She could not escape the fact that her position is aligned with that of the far right wing of the Republican Party, including fascist Marjorie Taylor Greene and Trump himself. Her explanation was that this wing of the Republicans is feeling the pressure from their constituents. That is like saying that those same Republicans who pushed through laws making it harder to vote were feeling the pressure of their constituents. The actual fact is that that leadership was leading the charge. From Trump on down, they are politically aligned with the fascist-linked Putin on every issue including ultra-nationalism, homophobia, misogyny, racism and repression in general. And now, Benjamin and others are giving them "left" political cover.



**Medea Benjamin**  
@medeabenjamin



What does it say about progressive Democrats in Congress when the best person on Ukraine is Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene???



**Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene** 🇺🇸 🗳️ @RepMTG · 30 Jun 2022

Ukraine is the MIC's new Iraq wrapped up with a pretty little NATO bow, with a nuclear present inside.

A unwanted gift that will keep giving for far too long.

2:05 pm · 2 Jul 2022

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Chomsky's approach was similar to that of Benjamin, while Vijay Prashad simply rattled off a demagogic stream of consciousness sentences which bore a strong resemblance to Trump's style of speaking. His main theme was advocating "Eurasianism". Basically, what that means is that Europe and Russia should be aligned against the United States.. This view was first clearly enunciated by the fascist ideologue Francis Parker Yokey. (See "Fascist ideas on the left") Today, a prominent exponent of Eurasianism is Russian fascist Aleksandr Dugin.

Benjamin was and is part and parcel of this pro-Putin "left".

Her role cannot be fully understood without understanding a central figure in all of this: Neville Roy Singham. Singham is a multimillionaire (probably billionaire) former tech entrepreneur and founder of "ThoughtWorks". He presently lives in China, where he has unknown investments. Among other things, Singham became highly influential in the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa. His influence there is considered to have been highly corrupting. He is also a denier of the genocide of the Uighurs in China. (For more on Singham's role in South Africa, see this interview with South African journalist Micah Reddy. For Singham's Uighur genocide denialism, see this article in New Lines Magazine.)

## **"Fashbuters" study**

In 2021, a group called "Fashbusters" published a study about the role of a fund called the Goldman Sachs Philanthropy Fund (GSPF). Here is a summary of what Fashbusters found, although we urge readers to read the entire study: This is a fund set up by an anonymous donor and used as a conduit to launder donations to various left groups. Fashbusters found that the GSPF "... funneled over \$12 million to the People's Forum, over \$12 million to Vijay Prashad's think-tank The Tricontinental LTD... \$210,000 to Codepink, and \$20,000 to AIPAC (the Association for Investment in Popular Action Committees (a pro-Assad lobbying group, not to be confused with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee which has the same acronym)."

Donations to People's Forum began in 2017 with "seed money" of \$2.5 million. It skyrocketed to \$12.5 million in 2019. Vijay Prashad's Tricontinental received a whopping \$13.256 million in 2019. Code Pink was just a bit player, receiving a mere \$897,000 in 2019. There are close links between People's Forum and ANSWER Coalition, mainly through the Party of Socialism and Liberation. And the main MC for the 11/19 event was Manolo De Los Santos, who is on the executive boards of both People's Forum and the Justice and Education Fund (JEF, another recipient of GSPF grant money.)

Although it cannot be proven at this time, the circumstantial evidence is that Singham is the money bags behind this Goldman Sachs fund. Much of this evidence was discovered when Singham ran afoul of the Indian government for his role funneling dark money into that country for political purposes. After outlining the circumstantial evidence, Fashbusters asks: "how likely is it that a former employee of Singham just happens to run a 501c4 (UCF) that got a massive GSPF donation in 2018 and that the Indian government discovered evidence

linking Singham to a 501c3 (JEF) are linked to one another and to People's Forum through large sums of money?"

This is the circle in which Medea Benjamin and Code Pink travel. Different ones of these elements play somewhat different roles. Some take on the "revolutionary" mantle. Benjamin and Code Pink are somewhat more moderate. All these different roles are necessary in order to give a "left" or "anti-imperialist" cover to support for Russian (and Chinese) imperialism.

In sum, Benjamin:

- Supports Putin's imperialist regime in Russia.
- Supports the criminal regimes of Iran and Syria while dismissing the living experiences and the voices of the peoples of those countries.
- Minimizes the repression of women in Iran and completely ignores the repression of national and ethnic minorities and of LGBTQ people in Russia and Iran.
- Supports the Russian annexation of parts of Ukraine.
- Is unapologetic about her being aligned with the far, far right, even including fascist Marjorie Taylor Greene.
- Is part and parcel of a "left" that takes these same positions.

Like the rest of the pro-Putin left, Benjamin rarely appears alongside genuine defenders of the working class and of human rights in general – those who stand for international working class solidarity. Therefore, she and her type can go somewhat unexposed. Benjamin had been scheduled to appear alongside Ukrainian socialist and opponent of Putin's invasion, Yuliya Yurchenko. It appears that Yulia Yurchenko's presence had been canceled, but is now on again. It may be that in the presence of Yurchenko Benjamin may modify her views and give lip service to the experiences and views of Ukrainians. Nothing she can say, however, will wipe away the permanent stain of her defense of the Russian, Iranian and Syrian regimes. We should be aware of and clarify the role of Medea Benjamin and her circle of pro-Putin "lefts", especially given their alignment with the likes of Marjorie Taylor Greene and Donald Trump.



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