

# AOC pushes warmed over liberal imperialism in Munich

The Grayzone's Max Blumenthal and Aaron Mate review the performance of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez at the Munich Security Conference and attempt to look beyond her gaffes for an actual foreign policy vision. ||| The Grayzone ||| Find more reporting at <https://thegrayzone.com> Support our original journalism at Patreon: <https://patreon.com/grayzone> Facebook: <https://facebook.com/thegrayzone> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/thegrayzonenews> Instagram: <https://instagram.com/thegrayzonenews> Minds: <https://minds.com/thegrayzone> Mastodon: <https://mastodon.social/@thegrayzone> #TheGrayzone

## #Max

But with Munich, for me, psychologically, it was a real reminder of how completely destroyed the Democratic Party is—how hopeless the Democratic Party elite is on foreign policy. And we've been so focused on Trump. Everything's about Trump. Trump eats up all the headlines. He's openly ripping the mask off the discredited rules-based order. And here, suddenly, we had a chance to gaze at the past, present, and future of the mostly liberal transatlantic foreign policy elite. And AOC is sort of seeking a foothold within that world because she realizes it's her stepping stone to, I don't know—a presidential run, a Senate run, to being wealthy and famous after she leaves the House.

I don't exactly know what she has in mind, but she telegraphed—or tried to preview—her performance partly through her top foreign policy advisor, who Aaron knows well, we both know well, Matt Duss. They announced they were going to offer a working-class perspective on U.S. foreign policy at the Munich summit. As speculation grows about her ambitions, Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez will speak on a bigger stage about the rise of populism and present her vision for U.S. foreign policy. Aaron, who's Matt Duss?

## #Aaron

Matt Duss is the former foreign policy advisor to Bernie Sanders, who's been consistently wrong on so many issues. He's a huge advocate for the Ukraine proxy war, basically, while claiming to be on the left. He tried to whip up support for Joe Biden's policy of, you know, blocking diplomacy and funneling tens of billions of dollars into the military-industrial complex, while still claiming that this is a progressive position when, you know, as we've talked about so much here at The Grayzone, there have been so many reasonable diplomatic opportunities to avoid this war and to end it much sooner—in fact, to stop it before Russia even invaded.

And Matt Duss has acted sort of as a voice from the left to, you know, intimidate and bully people on the left into supporting the Joe Biden policy, the Lindsey Graham policy, and the John McCain policy. And also on Palestine—he even, I mean, this is like, whatever—Ukraine, okay, that’s a harder issue in Washington to dissent on. You have to have a moral backbone, which people don’t really have. But even on Palestine, from the left, in late 2023, Matt Duss was still arguing against a ceasefire with Hamas. Basically, he and Bernie Sanders were saying that you can’t reach a ceasefire with Hamas because they’re a terrorist organization, blah, blah, blah.

So he plays, I think, a really dangerous role in occupying—well, I don’t get why. Like, yes, why does someone become a so-called foreign policy expert? What are the credentials for that, and what credentials does he have except for the fact that he worked for Bernie Sanders? Why do people like that get to have such influence, especially if they’re so out of step with the base? Like, OK, on Ukraine, a lot of people got convinced that it was a great thing to, you know, fuel a war. But on Palestine, most people supported a ceasefire from the start. But Bernie Sanders and Matt Duss were out of sync with that.

So how—why then does someone get elevated as a trusted foreign policy voice? I don't know. To me, it's because they're palatable to the establishment. They make themselves acceptable, and therefore they get promoted, you know, recognized as the reasonable leftist. So anyway, Matt Duss claims he's like AOC's tutor on foreign policy, and you can see the way she spoke in Munich, parroting so many establishment talking points—that he's had an influence.

## **#Max**

Yeah, he was constantly put in charge of these various think tanks in Washington, but I never knew what he actually did or accomplished, or what he brought to the table—other than being the in-house foreign policy adviser to Bernie and the Squad. And they’ve suffered for it. What he’s done, though, I guess successfully—I think he was at the Carnegie Endowment, which was the think tank of Bill Burns, who became CIA director—is hold the line within the progressive Squad against challenging Democratic policy on Ukraine, among other issues. So it’s sort of like gatekeeping. This is AOC on Ukraine policy. Did you want to say something?

## **#Aaron**

Well, yeah, just the most egregious example of Matt Duss came in the fall of 2022, when progressive Democrats led by Pramila Jayapal released a letter saying to Biden, “Hey, given the huge leverage we have over Ukraine—the tens of billions of dollars we're spending to fuel this war—let's use our leverage to end the war and have diplomacy with Russia.” And this very meek call for diplomacy—because it wasn’t even saying cut off the weapons, which I think it should have—it didn’t even say that. It was a very polite, tepid call for diplomacy. That elicited a neocon freakout, where people were calling them traitors, Putin puppets, blah, blah, blah.

That 24-hour neocon freakout got Pramila Jayapal and the Progressive Caucus to retract their pro-diplomacy letter. And Matt Duss, as a leading progressive foreign policy expert, instead of defending the letter, threw everyone who supported it under the bus and said it was ill-timed and wrong. So it's like he couldn't even stand up for a letter—a very meek letter—calling for diplomacy. And amazingly, a few weeks later, who else came out in favor of diplomacy? General Mark Milley, the top U.S. military officer, which showed that the top U.S. military officer was more pro-peace than a leading progressive foreign policy voice like Bernie Sanders' adviser, Matt Duss.

It was so pathetic. And not even Mark Milley coming out led people like Matt Duss to revisit their position. So everyone stuck to this militarist stance. It was hugely—on top of being the wrong position, right?—and that position's been vindicated so many times now. It was also just so cowardly that, like, when you come out with a position in favor of diplomacy, you're not going to stand by it just because some neocons get mad on Twitter and call you names. It was so pathetic, and it showed just how brittle the progressive foreign policy establishment can be in Washington.

## **#Max**

Well, here's the media-manufactured standard-bearer of the compliant U.S. left, AOC—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—someone called her "AOCIA"—on Ukraine.

## **#Speaker 03**

Well, of course, there's no conversation about Ukraine that can happen without Ukraine. They should lead in setting the terms on this. But overall, as a principle, we shouldn't reward imperialism. I don't think we should allow Russia—or any nation—to keep violating another nation's sovereignty and still be rewarded, with the takeaway being that they'll gain from it. What that looks like in specifics is a deeper conversation, but in principle, I think that's what we should be pursuing.

## **#Max**

You can see she's flanked by NATO officers, NATO think-tank hacks, and intelligence operatives. And next to Gretchen Whitmer, another governor, she's sort of stuttering: "On policy, it's a deeper conversation." She has no vision. You're not allowed to have another vision on Ukraine. You must continue to shovel Ukrainian men into the meat grinder and throw them into vans if you're a Democrat. No discussion allowed. Your ambitions will be destroyed—even at this point, when Ukraine hasn't had a battlefield victory in a couple of years, maybe more. Hundreds of thousands dead, and you can't say anything other than what she said. And she's there to present a working-class vision. Oh, and it's imperialism—Russia's the imperialist, not us, for putting hundreds of millions of dollars of military infrastructure and systems directly on Russia's border. You're not allowed to say that.

## **#Aaron**

What she's saying is you shouldn't reward imperialism unless it's promoted by John McCain and Lindsey Graham—because it was their imperialism that caused this whole mess, along with the Obama administration, by backing a coup in 2014. And there's such a long history after that, which we've talked about so many times. Unfortunately, this is where—look, I don't just fault AOC here—and that does, there's been such a progressive media whitewashing of the Ukraine war that you just can't discuss certain facts anymore. You can't discuss the 2014 coup. You can't discuss the Minsk Accords, which I think most people—I doubt even AOC knows about.

## **#Max**

He doesn't know what that is. None of them know about Istanbul.

## **#Aaron**

The Istanbul talks—which, again, we've talked about—but if no one else will discuss the most basic facts, like that there was a draft peace deal reached within the first weeks of Russia's invasion, before Boris Johnson and Joe Biden stepped in—because, as Boris Johnson said, they wanted Ukraine to be a porcupine that could be used to hurt Russia—then, because that peace deal interfered with that plan, they blocked it. If you can't talk about that, then you're going to get lines like this from AOC. There's a complete lack of awareness of the basic facts.

And I wonder, like, how long will it take for progressives to be able to acknowledge just some basic facts about Ukraine? Even that pro-diplomacy letter I mentioned didn't talk about any of that. It didn't talk about the coup, didn't talk about the Minsk Accords, didn't talk about the Istanbul talks—which it could have, to say, hey, there's a basis here for diplomacy. Russia and Ukraine reached a deal, which we then blocked. Let's just revive that. But they were too scared to touch it, because for whatever reason, people are afraid of being called names. It's a very schoolyard-like mentality—they don't want to be called Russian apologists.

## **#Max**

So here's Gretchen Whitmer, who's sitting beside AOC, and I think it illustrates your point—and another point—about how foreign policy, how the sausage is made in Washington.

## **#Speaker 04**

On Ukraine—what does victory actually look like?

## **#Aaron**

Oh, please. I'd love to hear your answer.

## **#Max**

She's like, "Why don't you talk about that? What are you doing in Munich if you don't want to talk about this gigantic European land war—and you're going to run for president?"

## **#Aaron**

And you're deferring to Trump's ambassador to NATO.

## **#Max**

That's such a great point.

## **#Aaron**

Yeah. So a Democratic presidential hopeful—possibly one—is deferring to Trump's NATO ambassador on one of the key foreign policy issues today. Yeah.

## **#Speaker 05**

It is. The two people I'm on the panel with are much more steeped in foreign policy than a governor is. But, you know, I do think that Ukraine's independence—keeping their land mass and having the support of all the allies—is the goal from my vantage point. Go ahead, Ambassador, do a better job.

## **#Max**

Oh my God. And you can see she's dressed up in this kind of admiral-ambassador suit to make her look presidential. They worked so hard on that. But she can't answer a basic question about what victory looks like in Ukraine, because obviously there's not going to be a victory. But also, she's proud—I mean, this is the point I want to make—she's proud to flaunt her ignorance. And this applies to AOC too, because as a U.S. governor, that's your way of ingratiating yourself with the foreign policy elite inside the Beltway. You're basically saying, "I'll outsource my brain to you. You guys can take over, and I'll do whatever you want." And then you bring in lots of money.

And AOC, she comes there with Matt Duss, but now the foreign policy elite is going to want to take her in more because they see that she's very malleable. She's empty. She can't speak. She has no geopolitical chops. And Matt Duss kind of failed in preparing her. But they still want to take her in and co-opt her because she's such a popular figure with her social media presence. So in that way, this was a successful trip for Gretchen Whitmer and AOC. That's how it works there. You don't want someone presenting an alternative vision to the transatlantic rules-based order or actually calling out hypocrisy. This was an incredible moment for AOC on Venezuela. She spoke before her constituency—her real constituency—college students in Berlin.

### **#Speaker 03**

A remark on who Maduro was as a leader: he canceled elections, he was anti-democratic. But that doesn't mean we can kidnap a head of state and engage in acts of war just because the nation is below the equator.

### **#Max**

And it is—well, a few fact checks there.

### **#Aaron**

Yeah, Venezuela is not below the equator. And I don't think Maduro even canceled an election. I mean, he's accused of having stolen one election. But the part that gets omitted—and this is where, again, the progressive line on Venezuela misses so many important points—are the underlying facts, including our role in trying to cancel Venezuela's elections when Chávez and then Maduro won, by imposing sanctions and fomenting regime change. And that's the stuff all these progressive leaders just refuse to talk about, so they end up with a very shallow critique—if you can even call it a critique—of Trump's foreign policy.

### **#Max**

Venezuela is not below the equator, but she never showed much interest. I tried to ask her about that back in 2019, during the first coup, and she just said, "Well, we're going to come out with a statement. You know, I defer to leadership." And Maduro did not—I mean, she says his name well—he did not cancel elections. Zelensky did. Zelensky, who was in Munich. So, you know, you're not allowed to mention that in Munich. And it really is—I mean, it's great that she's condemning his kidnapping.

But this speaks to the hypocrisy of all the European leaders she's trying to ingratiate herself with—that they're begging for U.S. support, for the support of the Democrats on Greenland, against Trump's bid to take over Greenland. Yet they all supported, to a person, down to Ursula von der Leyen, the kidnapping of Maduro. None of them would dare say anything against it. And then on Taiwan—she can't answer the question. I don't think you're allowed to answer that question within the Democratic Party. Within the Democratic Party, if you want to be taken seriously—even though there's a very easy answer—this was, I think, the worst moment.

### **#Speaker 04**

Would the U.S. actually commit troops to defend Taiwan if China were to move?

### **#Speaker 03**

You know, I think this is a very long-standing policy of the United States. What we're hoping for is to make sure we never get to that point. We want to ensure that all of our economic research and global positions are aimed at avoiding any such confrontation—and at preventing that question from even having to arise.

## **#Aaron**

I mean, look, first of all, it's so painful to listen to that. It took her so long to come up with a non-answer because she's not answering the question. The question is, will you go to war over Taiwan? Pretty easy answer, I think. And like, why didn't—at least, I mean, if she's not informed on the issue, okay, you can't be informed on everything—but why didn't she, I mean, where my mind would have gone if I were a calculating politician is, okay, well, Joe Biden said he would go to war, and Joe Biden was wrong on everything. And he was demented. He's not even popular. So why would I take Joe Biden's position? Why not actually renounce Joe Biden's position and show a break from him? And she couldn't even do that, because she's not prepared to take on anything. The foreign policy establishment, even on such an obvious issue, is not going to war with China over Taiwan.

## **#Max**

Yeah. I mean, she calls for preventing war, but when China moves, she can't say whether the U.S. should directly confront China militarily in a war that would, without a doubt, cost at least tens of thousands of lives. A lot of U.S. sailors would go down. It would probably be a regional war. She hasn't been prepared for that by her handlers, to present her working-class vision. The One China policy is the longstanding policy she's referring to, which holds that Taiwan is China. It's a pretty simple answer. But again, she's trying to win over forces in the Democratic Party and within the transatlantic elite that she should be forcefully condemning and opposing, right?

And there's no one within the Democratic Party of any status doing that. They're not allowed to. She should be opposing the Epstein class, as it's now known, which would favor a war it would profit from. But she's not. So I don't know how much more we can flog AOC, but her whole performance was about fighting the global right—as a standard-bearer of the left, one of the most easily identifiable figures with the sort of social-democratic, soft left that has some modicum of power or presence in Congress.

She didn't put forward a vision that was really an alternative to theirs, no matter how hard she tried. She didn't present a credible vision, and she doesn't understand the stakes. I don't think the stakes right now are left versus right. The stakes are the Fourth Reich we see on display in Munich versus everybody else. And if you can't see that clearly—that this is an anti-imperialist struggle—then there's no way I'm going to stop flogging you. It's not about you versus Orbán. There may be some cultural reasons for AOC to go after Orbán, but that doesn't get to the heart of the issue.

## **#Aaron**

She also had this line about how Trump's vision is to allow for these spheres of influence—so Russia gets to dominate its neighborhood, China gets to dominate its neighborhood. But that's not even true. It's just not true. Marco Rubio, if you listen to his speech, was talking about how, yeah, we want to control the whole world and we need Europe as our partner in that. If you're willing to be our partner in being a global hegemon, then great, we'll have you. And that's why Trump is tearing up nuclear arms control treaties with Russia, which I doubt AOC mentioned. That's why he's spending more than a trillion dollars, he says, on the Pentagon. So this idea that he's making these side deals with authoritarian leaders around the world and letting them—no, it's just not true.

It's not even true. I mean, maybe Trump might let Russia take parts of the Donbass, where you have a lot of people who want to be part of Russia anyway—that's just true. But aside from that, this idea of him ceding spheres of influence when he's currently threatening war with Iran, and establishing the so-called Board of Peace to basically replace the UN and make it even more obsolete—it's just such an off-base critique. And you can tell, I mean, Matt Duss wrote that, but it's just so wrong. I will, though—anyone who speaks out about the genocide, I'll at least acknowledge that and say that's a good thing. It's better than others on that issue. So, you know, I don't want to ignore that.

## **#Max**

It's a savvy political move on her part to call what took place in Gaza a genocide. After more than a year of refusing to do so and being confronted by activists, she's shifted her position toward where she thinks the grassroots, progressive, younger U.S. base—one that doesn't vote very reliably—is, to try to motivate them. And this comes after she forcefully defended her vote to send "defensive" weapons systems to Israel, which allow it to carry out one-way genocides.

## **#Aaron**

Yes, and also falsely claiming that Kamala Harris was working tirelessly for a ceasefire, which of course was a lie.

## **#Max**

Yeah, exactly. She said that at the Democratic National Convention. So it's cynical but savvy, and yet at the same time she's supporting the same racist, imperial system that the Munich Security Conference and its backers represent—one that's doomed Palestine to 75 years of being colonized and ethnically cleansed. And that's the whole problem with the NGO-ified, foundation-ized, "compatible left" that holds that space in the U.S. and across the West. You know, meeting with the SPD the day after her Berlin appearance—the party that led Europe's support for the Gaza genocide—

it just shows the insincerity of it all. So, uh, but again, it's savvy. That's where we are. Young people, they know which way the wind is blowing, and it's time for AOC to— I mean, she needs to be challenged on this. But I don't know how many people are paying attention at this level.