

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

### THE SENATE WANTS TO LIMIT AMERICANS' FREE SPEECH IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE OCCUPATION

Before Donald Trump took the podium for his delayed State of the Union address, the Senate [passed](#) a Middle East policy package similarly delayed by the shutdown. At first glance, the legislation, S.1, features all the Congressionally-accepted staples of U.S. foreign policy: Reauthorizing military aid to Israel, security assistance to Jordan, and new sanctions for Syria. Two components of the bill, however, sparked necessary controversy.

#### **PREVENTING AMERICANS FROM ENGAGING ON FOREIGN POLICY**

Designed to suppress Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) activity deemed “[not appropriate](#)” to use against Israel, the Senate bill allows state and municipal governments to [punish](#) companies and individuals that boycott Israel, making it easier to pass legislation that combats the BDS movement and protects the anti-BDS laws currently enacted in twenty-six states.

Regardless of your position on the BDS movement, the measure is a direct attack on Americans' rights to free speech and political engagement. Our ability to work on foreign policy rests, in part, on our ability to criticize allies of the United States, whether that is Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, [France](#), or Israel. Legislation that emboldens the silencing of certain political activity threatens to handcuff the peaceful advocacy of any American seeking to change U.S. foreign policy and sets a dangerous precedent. As the ACLU has [said](#), “If the government has the power to penalize or outlaw boycotts of Israel today, there is nothing that would prevent it from exercising that power to suppress civil society boycotts against other favored entities tomorrow, whether that's Planned Parenthood, the NRA, or Saudi Arabia.”

Anti-BDS laws are already beginning to take a toll on the day-to-day lives of Americans. Take for example, Bahia Amawi, a Palestinian-American children's speech pathologist in Texas who [lost her job](#) with a public school district after refusing to sign a political oath affirming that she does not and will not boycott -- or even advocate for boycotting -- Israel or companies operating in the occupied West Bank.

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



Moreover, the anti-BDS laws this legislation seeks to protect are part of a grander erosion of Americans' right to engage on the subject of Palestinian rights. Across the country, college students even partly associated with pro-Palestinian advocacy risk having their names and photographs posted to The Canary Mission, a website that "[compiles dossiers](#) on Palestinian rights advocates and labels them racists, anti-Semites, and supporters of terrorism." The site's targeted harassment can intimidate young people concerned about employment prospects into silence. That defamation tactic extends beyond college students: The first two Muslim congresswomen -- Reps. Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, the first Palestinian-American member of Congress -- have been repeatedly [vilified](#) and smeared by their colleagues with bad faith accusations of anti-Semitism and bigotry for their critical stances on Israel and support of the BDS movement.

The ACLU has firmly maintained that anti-BDS laws [violate](#) First Amendment protections. However, we cannot continue to lay our fundamental civil liberties at the feet of our courts. While federal courts have blocked anti-boycott laws in Kansas and Arizona, a federal court in Arkansas ruled in their favor, demonstrating that striking down anti-BDS laws in court is by no means guaranteed. Our courts are fallible - we must treat them as such.

Boycotts have long been [integral](#) to American civil resistance, from boycotting British tea to boycotting segregated businesses in Mississippi. The freedom to call for and engage in boycotts extends to how Americans choose to politically engage on U.S. foreign policy today. All Americans have the right to interrogate U.S. engagement with the world - not matter how inconvenient, uncomfortable, or painful.

## **THE SENATE WON'T AUTHORIZE WARS, BUT IS HAPPY TO PROLONG THEM**

As if trampling on Americans' civil liberties wasn't enough, the Senate bill also works to perpetuate endless war and empower those seeking war with Iran.

Senators [voted](#) 70-26 to accept an amendment - dubbed the "McConnell amendment" - warning the Trump administration of the dangers of a "precipitous withdrawal" of U.S. forces from Syria and Afghanistan, advancing a military-first approach in Afghanistan and Syria that for years has failed to curb violence, achieve stability, or limit the reach of extremist groups. Remember: Congress never authorized the use of military force in Syria in the first place. Congress's *actual* job is to make those authorizations, which it has consistently failed to do. Apparently, the only time Congress actually wants to vote on war is to prevent troops from coming home.

The amendment's repeated references to countering Iran's activities in Syria and Afghanistan also underhandedly [suggests](#) that U.S. forces must remain in both countries to counter Iran. No matter how you spin it, there is no Congressional authorization for military force against Iran. So

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



like Sen. Chris Murphy, we are “[deeply worried](#) about the language in this amendment that empowers those in the administration who are jonesing for a fight with Iran.”

## A WINDOW INTO THE 2020 FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE

While S.1 passed with broad bipartisan support, 77 to 23, a closer look at the [22 dissenting Democrats](#) sends a promising signal about [Democrats' approach to foreign policy in 2020](#). Apart from Sen. Amy Klobuchar, all of the announced or rumored Democratic presidential-hopefuls in the Senate voted against the legislation, including Senators Elizabeth Warren, Cory Booker, Kamala Harris, Kirsten Gillibrand, Sherrod Brown, Jeff Merkley, and Bernie Sanders.

But before 2020, this legislation must fail in the House. Members of Congress have the responsibility to listen to their constituents, not silence them. It's their job to authorize wars, not perpetuate them. By passing this legislation, the Senate has abdicated its responsibility on both those tasks. Now, we must pressure the House not to make the same mistake.

## BURIED LEDES

U-S-A! U-S-A! A new [report](#) from Freedom House found that “democracy is in retreat around the world,” particularly in the United States, where it “has weakened significantly over the past eight years, and **the current president's ongoing attacks on the rule of law, fact-based journalism, and other principles and norms of democracy threaten further decline.**”

**We almost kind of went to war with Iran in Syria last year over a port-a-potty** but thankfully Air Force officers [disobeyed](#) what they rightly viewed as illegal orders.

The New York Times editorial board [recently laid out](#) all the reasons **we need to end the war in Afghanistan.**

And [it's okay](#) to think Trump is a complete jackass while at the same time **supporting his instincts to end our endless wars** -- even while disagreeing with how haphazardly he has come to those conclusions or intends to carry them out (and it seems like that message [is getting through](#)).

A new [study](#) found that at least one-third of the ice in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region, where Mt. Everest is located, **could melt by the end of the century**, threatening the water supplies for nearly 2 billion people -- even if aggressive action is taken to curb greenhouse gases.

Israeli settlements in the West Bank [grew at a much faster rate](#) than in previous years with even more rapid growth to come “**thanks to the policies of the Trump administration.**”

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



A recent [poll](#) found that **two-thirds of American voters oppose the Trump administration's policy** of withdrawing from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

[CNN's lede](#) speaks for itself: "Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners have **transferred American-made weapons to al Qaeda-linked fighters**, hardline Salafi militias, and other factions waging war in Yemen, in violation of their agreements with the United States."

Amnesty International came out with a [report](#) this week with similar findings: "[T]he UAE has become a major conduit for armoured vehicles, mortar systems, rifles, pistols, and machine guns – which **are being illicitly diverted to unaccountable militias accused of war crimes and other serious violations.**"

An anonymous [survey](#) of 12,000 cadets and midshipmen at three military service academies last year found **a 50 percent increase in unwanted sexual contact among servicemembers.**

Remember that [ridiculous speech](#) Mike Pompeo gave at the American University in Cairo last month? Faculty [there are calling on the university president to be fired for inviting him.](#)

And finally, satire for the depressing. The [kids these days are souring on the invasion of nations on shaky premises.](#) "I mean, I guess drones are cool and all. But I prefer using them to take selfies during a three day nature cleanse in Joshua Tree National Park. Not, like, hellfire missiles and stuff," said one Portland resident.

[BONUS](#) and finally: "Seb Gorka is a national treasure. **When in doubt, always go full-Gorka.**"