



By: James Oliphant

Democratic silence over the Ilhan Omar raid speaks volumes about the party's priorities and its fears



A decade ago, a common sight at a Donald Trump rally was thousands of people chanting “Lock her up! Lock her up!”

Trump’s supporters, following his lead, were calling boisterously for the jailing of Hillary Clinton, the Democrat who ran against Trump in 2016.

Trump never did get Clinton behind bars, but last week demonstrated that the president remains more than ready to use the power of his office to take down political opponents after his Homeland Security forces raided the home of Democratic lawmaker **Ilhan Omar**.

Agents spent hours in the home and left with several boxes of documents, according to reports. Administration officials, from Trump on down, have accused Omar, who is in her fourth term in the House of Representatives, of immigration fraud. Omar, along with her family, emigrated to the US from Somalia when she was 12. She reportedly became a citizen at 17.

Indeed, the president has made no secret of his antipathy for the Black Muslim lawmaker, who has consistently been one of his most vociferous critics. “I think she’s a terrible person,” Trump told reporters last week after the raid. “I think she’s a terrible congresswoman. I don’t think she loves our country at all.”

He also made sure to tell the world that he believes Omar is “totally crooked.” The administration’s probe seeks to assemble a case to strip Omar of her **U.S. citizenship** and ultimately deport her, The Wall Street Journal reported last week. Items taken from her home included her cellphone, notebooks, personal computers and her passport.

No war cries, no marches

Given Trump’s public animus toward Omar and the fact that he appears to be pushing for a politically motivated investigation of a sitting member of the House, you might think prominent Democrats, from Clinton on down,

would be screaming to the rafters and rushing to the battlements. After all, isn’t this the Very Thing They Warned Us About if Trump were reelected?

Well, truth is, they aren’t exactly tripping over themselves to defend her. On Sunday, former President Barack Obama finally released a statement – six days after the raid – calling the administration’s actions “appalling.”

“The full weight of the federal government is being brought down on a law-abiding elected official because she has dared to criticize the president,” Obama said.

Chuck Schumer, the top Democrat in the Senate who may run the chamber if his party grabs control in next month’s elections, has said nothing publicly. Neither has Clinton. Or Kamala Harris, the last Democratic presidential nominee.

The loudest officials coming to her defense are the ones you would expect: her colleagues in the left-leaning progressive caucus, including Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Bernie Sanders, as well as New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a Democratic socialist.

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Senator Amy Klobuchar, who is running for governor of Omar’s home state of Minnesota, questioned the timing of the raid, but didn’t offer assurances that Omar was innocent.

No Republican official has condemned the raid even though the timing violates the traditional Justice Department custom that no adverse public action be taken against a politician during a race within two months of election day.

Omar is up for reelection – and as Obama noted in his statement, the probe could set a

precedent that could be followed one day by a Democratic administration.

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Some commentators on the left have noticed: “Democratic leaders, call a press conference and stand firmly behind Ilhan Omar and your Muslim elected officials and candidates. Enough of this right-wing fearmongering and Islamophobia,” Wajahat Ali posted on X last week.

Writing in *The Nation*, Jeet Heer argued that party establishment figures have failed to rise to **Omar’s defense** as they had with other Trump targets such as former National Security Adviser John Bolton, New York Attorney General Letitia James, and former FBI Director James Comey.

Political malpractice

The reasons for the widespread Democratic silence have as much to do with Omar as Trump, as well as with the party’s hopes for taking control of Congress and its internal divisions over the president’s aggressive immigration policies.

And in some ways, the silence is understandable. Because with Omar, Trump has set a political trap.

The president has always shown a talent for identifying foes who are in some ways compromised and unable to fully fight back.

Think of how he browbeat universities such as Columbia to alter programs because of their reliance on federal money or how he has intimidated the news media by pressuring its corporate ownership.

With Omar, he has gone after a figure who, as an unabashed progressive, a Muslim, and an outspoken defender of the Palestinian cause, has become marginalized within her own party

while becoming a magnet for Republican attacks.

Omar has called for the elimination of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency and supports a national healthcare program. She was an advocate for the “Defund the Police” movement. She has demanded the U.S. cut off military aid to Israel, which she has accused of war crimes.

For a party trying to claw back into power, Omar is inconvenient

She has at times been criticized by House Democratic leadership for engaging in what they viewed as antisemitic tropes by questioning U.S. support for Israel. Omar has maintained her criticism is aimed at the influence of pro-Israel lobby groups.

At the same time, Omar has long been a central figure in GOP attack ads and the subject of cable-news punditry, with conservatives frequently suggesting she has links to terrorism.

For a party trying to **claw back into power**, Omar is inconvenient. For some candidates, associating with her might even be political malpractice.

She may be the hill few want to die on.

And, of course, there is always the chance that prosecutors will find evidence that could lead to charges that Omar or her family did violate the law, which would put Democrats in an even more tenuous position.

The only issue on which Democrats don’t hold an advantage

The raid also came as Democrats continue to be divided over Trump’s immigration policies, with some, like Omar and Ocasio-Cortez, calling for the abolition of ICE, while moderates are more inclined to speak of

reforming the beleaguered service.

Even as Trump's overall approval rating has tanked, immigration remains the issue on which he is strongest, according to polls, with voters less likely to favor his enforcement and deportation policies but more likely to back his call for border security.

An ABC News **poll** released Sunday found that the public trusts both parties about equally on immigration, practically the only issue on which Democrats don't hold an advantage.

Trump has made disparaging remarks about the Somali immigrant community in Minneapolis

Republicans have overwhelmingly focused on immigration as an issue in campaign ads as opposed to Democrats.

According to an **analysis** published last week by Third Way, a Democratic think tank, Republicans spent \$111 million over the preceding six weeks on immigration-related ads in battleground races, compared to just \$20 million by Democrats.

And along with Omar, Trump has sought to blacken the image of the city she represents, Minneapolis. It's been on the administration's radar ever since the George Floyd protests of 2020, and was one of the U.S. cities targeted for robust immigration enforcement operations last year.

Trump has made disparaging remarks about the Somali immigrant community there – unseating Omar would be one way to deny that community its chosen representative.

Largely on her own

While Omar is unlikely to lose her reelection bid, the probe could further damage her as a national figure and her credibility as a spokesperson for the left. A dispute over her

immigration status promises to muddy the waters around her further.

The raid is also part of a Republican midterm strategy that has often equated following Islam with being anti-American or favoring terrorism.



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In August, Trump complained at a rally that "we have jihadists being elected all over the place." He has labeled Abdul El-Sayed, the Democratic Senate candidate in Michigan, a "radical jihadist" and accused him of being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, although there's no evidence to support such a claim.

During remarks last week, Vice President **JD Vance** openly questioned El-Sayed's loyalty, telling a Michigan crowd that "he wants to use the grievances of faraway lands to punish you." He has also called El-Sayed "very, very evil."

Senator John Kennedy, who campaigned for El-Sayed's Republican opponent, Mike Rogers, similarly told reporters El-Sayed "sleeps in a Bin Laden jersey."

El-Sayed has a slight lead over Rogers in the Senate race, polls show. And with Republicans right now underwater on issues like the economy and the Iran War, they're scrambling to find any line of attack they can.

You might think the administration's inclination to conflate Islam with terrorism might be another reason for Democrats to speak up. But as the days pass, it appears most

of them are willing to sit back and see how this all plays out.

For better or worse, Ilhan Omar is largely on her own.