

[Democratic Platform Defies International Law on the Middle East](#)

The DNC foreign policy platform stresses human rights, yet ignores how the US denies them.

Last week's Democratic National Convention provided hope and excitement with the nomination of the new standard-bearer Kamala Harris, bringing some hope for the progressive wing of the party largely shut out from leadership positions, particularly on the foreign policy front. The strong sense of unity was undermined, however, by Israel's U.S.-backed genocidal bombing campaign on Gaza and the threat of a larger regional war. Similarly, the [Democratic Party platform](#) has received [high praise](#) for putting forward the most progressive domestic policy positions in decades. However, on the foreign policy front, the platform is well to the right of the views of most rank-and-file Democrats, particularly regarding the Middle East. Its thrust is decidedly hawkish, praising President Joe Biden's decision to bomb no less than four Middle Eastern countries despite the lack of congressional authorization.

Perhaps most disturbingly, the platform criticizes "Trump's fecklessness and weakness in the face of Iranian aggression during his presidency" by not responding militarily to attacks by Iran and Iranian-backed groups in Iraq and elsewhere, citing four separate incidents that took place under his administration. What the platform conveniently omits, however, is that these attacks could be traced back to U.S. actions. Under Donald Trump, the U.S. withdrew from the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action**, which had severely limited Iran's nuclear program, and instituted a policy of "maximum pressure," implementing wide-ranging unilateral sanctions against the country. The U.S. went on to conduct an airstrike in Iraq that killed the leading Iranian general, Qassim Suleimani.

While the platform criticizes Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, it also implies the United States could be open to using force to insure that "Iran will never be allowed to develop nuclear weapons." By contrast, there is no mention of the nuclear weapons programs of Israel, Pakistan and India, which are also in violation of UN Security Council resolutions regarding their nuclear programs, essentially saying that nuclear nonproliferation should only be enforced when the country is not a U.S. ally.

Despite frequent references to democracy and human rights in the foreign policy section, there is no discussion of the denial of such basic rights and freedoms under U.S.-backed dictatorships and occupying armies. Defending a nation's sovereignty is stressed as a principle worth defending in regard to Ukraine, but there is nothing about reversing Trump's recognition of Morocco and Israel's illegal annexations of territories seized by military force, effectively **rejecting the sovereignty of Western Sahara, Syria and Palestine**.

While Arab governments have long agreed to recognize Israel in return for the end of the occupation, the platform appears to endorse Trump's efforts to undermine any leverage Arab states might have in supporting Palestinian statehood by pushing them to recognize Israel beforehand in exchange for strengthened U.S. support for these autocratic regimes. (A survey of U.S. Middle East scholars found that nearly three-quarters of them thought the so-called [Abraham Accords](#), spearheaded by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, actually had a negative impact on the prospects of peace. Only 6 percent said it has had a positive impact.) The Democratic platform, however, praises Biden for having "directed his Administration to build on the Abraham Accords" and attempting to expand "a historic normalization deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia."

The platform attacks the United Nations for what it calls "one-sided efforts to condemn Israel" despite its clear condemnation of Hamas and its attack on October 7. Likewise, it praises the Biden administration for **vetoing**

otherwise unanimous UN Security Council resolutions that would have imposed an immediate ceasefire on the grounds that it would allow Hamas to continue to rule Gaza.

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It even accuses the United Nations of attempting to “delegitimize” Israel, despite the fact that no UN body has passed any resolution or policy in at least 45 years that could reasonably be interpreted as challenging that country's right to exist. It would appear that the platform is therefore either 1) claiming that demands that the Israeli government abide by international humanitarian law and other legal standards required of all countries somehow counts as delegitimization, or 2) deliberately trying to discredit the United Nations in its attempts to acknowledge and enforce international law. Meanwhile, Israel is continuing to kill UN and other humanitarian workers at an alarming pace; at least 289 aid workers have been killed in Gaza since the war began.

The Democratic platform “strongly supports Israel in the fight against Hamas” and notes how the administration has “made clear the United States wants to see Hamas defeated” despite [doubts among U.S. officials](#) and [Israel military](#) it is even possible. It condemns Hamas's attacks against Israeli civilians but not Israel's attacks against Palestinian civilians (which have resulted in [45 times](#) the number of deaths). It mentions “immense civilian pain and extreme suffering being caused by the conflict” and the “deadly consequences of the Israel-Hamas war” without saying who is responsible for the killing. In the document, the party says Hamas “sought to destroy the promise” of a two-state solution on October 7, and denounces the [sexual violence](#) that took place. Meanwhile, it makes no reference to the Israeli government's sexual violence and rejection of a two-state solution.

Despite ending U.S. aid to the United Nations Works and Relief Agency, the primary provider of humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza, the platform praises the Biden administration for its supposed efforts to “ensure the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people,” claiming, “The Administration has worked relentlessly to deliver food, medicine, and other aid to the people of Gaza.”

When Trump announced in 2017 that the U.S. would recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, he upended decades of national policy and sparked an international outcry. During his administration, Biden upheld Trump's controversial decision to move the U.S. embassy to the holy city. The Democratic platform insists that Jerusalem “should remain the capital of Israel” but that any Palestinian claims should be subjected to the approval of the Israeli government, which has categorically ruled out sharing the city, long the center of Palestinian commercial, cultural, educational and religious life.

Not only does it oppose any effort from the United Nations to apply pressure on Israel to end its occupation, the Democratic platform even condemns civil society campaigns for boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS). By ruling out any way of pressuring Israel to end the occupation, the platform's call for Palestinians to have “self-determination, dignity, security, and freedom, and ultimately a state of their own” appears to be little more than a token gesture to appease the party's base.

The platform praises the “historic aid package worth \$14 billion,” which includes additional armaments the Biden administration has provided unconditionally to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far right government in the face of ongoing war crimes. It categorically rejects conditioning military aid to Israel under any circumstances by insisting the pledge to provide at least \$3.8 billion in aid annually over the next four years is “ironclad.”

Biden's appointment of Deborah Lipstadt as U.S. special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism won praise from the platform. In 2007, Lipstadt wrote an article for [The Washington Post](#) in which she accused Jimmy Carter of antisemitism and compared him to the notorious antisemite and Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke, all because of a book the former

president wrote opposing the Israeli occupation and colonization of the West Bank. Meanwhile, the platform also lauds Biden for broadening the definition of antisemitism in ways that could restrict certain criticisms of Israel and Zionism.

On a positive note, the platform for the first time came out against Israeli settlement expansion and extremist settler violence, but the platform essentially rules out anything — such as conditioning aid, allowing the UN to act or civil society efforts like BDS — that would stop it. “President Biden and Vice President Harris recognize the worth of every innocent life, whether Israeli or Palestinian,” the document claims, despite the administration providing the arms responsible for tens of thousands of Palestinian civilian deaths.

Indeed, as journalist [Ryan Grim](#) observed, the section of the platform “reads as if AIPAC wrote it.”

What is striking is that the platform’s planks on Israel and Palestine are contrary to the view of the vast majority of registered Democrats. For example, only a minority of Democratic voters support [unconditional military assistance](#) to Netanyahu’s far right government and 62 percent of registered Democratic voters [support](#) suspending of military aid to Israel. [Another poll](#) shows that a majority of Democrats would prefer a presidential nominee who does not support military aid to Israel.

Democrats familiar with the BDS campaign are more likely to [support it](#) than oppose it by a more than 3:1 margin. A poll [published](#) in March shows that nearly three times as many Democrats believe that “Israel has gone too far and its military actions are not justified” as those who believe that “Israel is defending its interests and its military actions are justified.” And despite the strong bias towards the rights and concerns of Israelis relative to Palestinians contained in the platform, one poll predating October 7 shows that [Democratic voters](#) are more likely to be sympathetic to Palestinians than Israelis.

Similarly, [large majorities](#) of Democrats oppose U.S. support for Saudi Arabia and [Biden’s efforts](#) to form a defense pact with the family dictatorship that runs the country. And only [11 percent of Democrats](#) support military action towards Iran to target their nuclear program.

It should be noted, however, that the platform was written prior to Biden’s withdrawal from the race. The document could be read as a reflection of his strident views on Israel/Palestine and his hawkish views toward the region as a whole, not those of Kamala Harris, who is seen by some analysts [as not as hardline](#) as the president. However, the failure to include a Palestinian American speaker and other dismissive actions towards the Uncommitted delegates and other peace and human rights activists left many questioning what kind of change might be coming in a Harris presidency.

The platform falsely claims Biden has been leading the effort for a ceasefire, when he’s only advocating a temporary truce.

In Harris’s [acceptance speech](#), she condemned the massacre of Israeli civilians by Hamas, but she only used the passive voice in describing the suffering of Palestinian civilians. Significantly, however, one of the biggest applause lines of her speech was where she went beyond Biden’s rhetoric by declaring she would work for a future where Palestinians can “realize their right to dignity, security, freedom and self-determination.”

It is difficult for a sitting vice president to openly disagree with their administration’s policy. While *The Washington Post* [reported](#) Harris “has pushed the rest of the Biden Administration to more heavily consider Palestinian suffering in its response to Israel’s war in Gaza, lambasting the civilian death toll, calling on Israel to allow more aid into the territory, and speaking more forcefully and empathetically than President Biden about the Palestinian plight,” she has still [rejected](#) calls for an arms embargo.

Along with Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and CIA Director Bill Burns, Harris has been among those within Biden’s inner circle who has tried, thus far unsuccessfully, to push him to get tougher on Netanyahu by threatening to withhold some military aid and other arms transfers.

The Middle East segment of the platform therefore may have looked different if Harris rather than Biden had played a leading role in its drafting. At the same time, while a Harris administration could potentially be more moderate than the Biden administration regarding Middle East policy, supporters of peace, human rights and international law will still have their work cut out for them.