

[Will Kamala Break With Joe on Israel?](#)

While her Senate record was hawkish, Harris has signaled she'd make justice for Palestinians a higher priority than Biden as President.

There are some signs that, despite her [hawkish record](#) as a U.S. Senator and some of her [statements](#) as Vice President, Kamala Harris would be tougher on Israel than President Joe Biden.

But don't expect any dramatic break with the current administration's policies in the course of the campaign.

It is extremely difficult for a sitting Vice President to be elected President. [Only six](#) office-holders have tried since the early nineteenth century, and four of them lost. They have to find a balance between asserting their own agenda and not appearing disloyal by contradicting their President's positions. This is particularly true on foreign policy. Regarding [Israel-Palestine](#), in the words of those who know her, "Harris is going to try to emphasize her independence from Biden without breaking with him."

But it's also true that, as *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."

Following her meeting with Netanyahu on July 25, which she described as "frank," [Harris underscored](#) her middle ground by reiterating support for Israel's right to self-defense and the imperative of releasing the hostages while also highlighting the massive civilian casualties and ongoing suffering in Gaza and the urgency of ending the war soon.

From near the start of Israel's bombing campaign, [she has often](#) been the first high-ranking Biden Administration official to speak out against the high civilian death toll and challenge how Israel has prosecuted the war. She was the first to publicly call for a ceasefire and insist that Israel limit civilian casualties. In June, while other administration officials were unconditionally praising an Israeli raid that freed four hostages, she [highlighted](#) the more than 270 Palestinians that were "tragically killed" during the attack.

Along with Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and C.I.A. Director Bill Burns, Harris has been among those within Biden's inner circle who has tried, unsuccessfully, to push him to get tougher on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Given the Vice President's constitutional role as President of the Senate, they normally preside over joint sessions of Congress, especially those hosting a foreign leader. Although she used the excuse of having another engagement, Harris's absence during Netanyahu's controversial speech on July 24 was significant and led to harsh criticism from both [Speaker of the House Mike Johnson](#) and Donald Trump, who insisted—despite Harris's outspoken opposition to antisemitism and being married to a Jewish man—she was "totally against the Jewish people."

By contrast, Harris's Senate record in regard to Israel-Palestine was more hawkish.

In Harris's first foreign policy vote as a Senator in January 2017, she sided with President-elect Donald Trump in criticizing the outgoing Obama Administration's refusal to veto a modest, and largely symbolic, [U.N.](#)

[Security Council resolution](#). The resolution called on Israel to stop expanding its illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, which violate the [Fourth Geneva Convention](#) and a [landmark ruling](#) by the International Court of Justice.

Co-sponsored by Harris, the Senate resolution also challenged the right of the United Nations to weigh in on questions of international humanitarian law in territories under foreign belligerent occupation. She voted with Republican Senate Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky against fellow California Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein and with Republican House leader Paul Ryan of Wisconsin against Democratic House Leader Nancy Pelosi of California.

Harris has accused boycotts and divestment campaigns targeting the Israeli occupation of antisemitism, but in 2019 [voted against](#) a bill that would have punished those advocating such tactics.

At an address to AIPAC in 2017, she [claimed](#) that efforts in the United Nations to pressure the Netanyahu government to end its violations of international humanitarian law were designed to “delegitimize Israel.” She even [signed](#) a letter that same year criticizing the United Nations and its agencies for such efforts while commending Trump’s U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley’s attacks on the world body.

During Harris’s 2020 presidential campaign, [The Intercept](#) reported that, “Unlike some of her counterparts in the Senate, [Harris] has not publicly made any demands of Israel or Netanyahu regarding the human rights of Palestinians.” At another moment during the Democratic primary, she refused to join fellow Senators and presidential contenders like Bernie Sanders, Independent of Vermont, and Elizabeth Warren, Democrat of Massachusetts, in signing a letter to Netanyahu [demanding](#) a halt to the impending demolition of a Palestinian village. She also did not join Sanders and Warren in criticizing Israel’s excessive use of lethal force against Palestinians.

Despite [damning reports](#) on Israeli repression against Arabs in both the West Bank and Israel proper, Harris [lionized Israel](#) as being a “beautiful home to democracy and justice.”

In May 2020, she [signed](#) a Senate letter encouraging the Trump Administration to oppose any investigations by the International Criminal Court of possible war crimes by Israel, even though the Court was also investigating Hamas. The letter questioned whether the Israeli-occupied territories were actually occupied territories. It claimed they were simply “disputed” territories (implying that Israel has equal claim to the West Bank as Palestinians who had lived there for centuries) and the matter was, therefore, outside of the Court’s jurisdiction. It also insisted that Israel has a “robust judicial system” that was “willing and able to prosecute war crimes of its personnel,” despite considerable [evidence to the contrary](#).

Harris, like Biden, maintains the line that the United Nations should not have any role regarding Israel and Palestine. She co-sponsored [a resolution](#) asserting that the issue of these illegal settlements should be decided only through U.S.-sponsored “direct talks” between the Palestinians living under occupation and their Israeli occupiers. Not only has Harris’s strategy not worked—this has been U.S. policy for over thirty years, during which the number of settlers has [nearly doubled](#)—but Trump’s appointees focusing on the negotiations were all strong supporters of Israeli occupation and settlements and opposed Palestinian statehood.

Her public positions as Vice President have at times seemed to toe the official line. Although [polls show](#) more than 70 percent of registered Democrats believe aid to Israel should be conditional on Israeli adherence to international legal norms and human rights standards, Harris has promised that the Biden Administration would [not condition aid](#) to Israel under any circumstances. “Joe has made it clear he will not tie security assistance to any political decisions that Israel makes,” she said in a call to Jewish donors, “and I couldn’t agree more.”

In recent years, most congressional Democrats have aligned more with the moderate pro-Israel group J Street as opposed to the hardline AIPAC, which has generally backed Republicans. During her first two years in the Senate, Harris was one of the few Democrats to appear before the [rightwing pro-Netanyahu](#) organization. Indeed, as the *Jewish Telegraph Agency* [observed](#), her record demonstrated that “She’s more AIPAC than J Street.”

In recognition of her increasingly moderate views, however, J Street—which refused to endorse Harris when she was running for Senate—has now [endorsed her](#) for President.

Harris’s shift to a less hardline position could be attributed to a number of factors. Her network, in contrast to Biden’s, is younger and more diverse. Like other women of color from a younger generation, Harris is [less inclined](#) to see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the same unidimensional perspective as Biden and many older white male leaders. And like many liberal supporters of Israel, the shock and horror of Israel’s [killing](#) of tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians in Gaza since October has led to a critical re-evaluation of the United States’ relationship with Israel.

Her choice of Phil Gordon, a former Obama Administration official who has been known to be more open to challenging Israeli policies, as her national security adviser is a striking contrast to Biden’s hardline National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.

Some [Biden Administration officials](#) who had resigned in protest of the president’s support for Israel’s war on Gaza have expressed hope that a Harris Administration would be better. Former State Department official Josh Paul said that Harris seems less “fixed and intransigent” than Biden and Lily Greenberg Call, who was an organizer for the Harris presidential campaign in Iowa, said, “I’ve worked for Kamala, and I know she’ll do the right thing.”

In addition to concerns about his age, Biden’s strident support for Israel’s war on Gaza was [a major reason](#) he fell behind in the polls, with many progressives, young people, Muslims, and Arab Americans threatening to vote for minor party candidates or not vote at all. Harris may be able to win many of them back and this could make the difference in November.

As President, Harris would likely return to the Obama Administration’s willingness to criticize Israel more frequently and strongly. The question, however, is whether—unlike Obama—she would be willing to put those words into concrete action to force Israel to make the necessary compromises for peace.

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