

Political Pretence: The Democrats and the Palestinians

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The fact that the Democrats currently occupy the White House has done little to ruffle the equation of blood and gore in the Middle East, notably regarding the fate of the Palestinians. The ongoing Israeli campaign of stunning ruthlessness against the Gaza unfortunates is certainly a worry for some Democratic strategists, if only because certain voters are finally expressing an opinion on the subject. Israel, right or wrong, is no longer an entirely plausible proposition.

In swing states such as Michigan, the cranky and disgruntled on the issue, certain given the potential role of Arab American voters, is not negligible. In May, a published Arab American Institute (AAI) poll [revealed](#) that support for **President Joe Biden** among Arab Americans had collapsed to a mere 20%. This was telling, given that Biden had won 60% of the same voting bloc in 2020.

The potential consequence of that shift has not gone unnoticed among pro-Israeli voices keen to arrest any potential tide. On the electoral battleground, **Representative Jamaal Bowman** can count himself as one of the first Democratic figures to lose a primary for his stance against Israel's treatment of Palestinians. (It should be said that his stance on Israel has [not always been a consistent one](#).) Bowman had previously defeated the hawkish **Eliot Engel** in New York's 16th congressional district in the Bronx and southern Westchester County, the latter known for his cosy relationship, not only with Israel but with weapons manufacturers.

Last month, it was Bowman's turn to taste defeat, a fate more or less assured by the muscular support offered by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to his centrist opponent George Latimer, which came to a stunning US\$14 million. The scandalously hefty spending in that primary made it the most expensive in the history of the House of Representatives.

At the highest levels, the scene is set for the pudding of mawkish insincerity. The presumptive Democratic nominee for the White House is certainly offering this in spades. **Kamala Harris's** [comments](#) on the slaughter in Gaza and Israel's overall policy towards Palestinians suggest political moulding and shifting, a ploy intended to stave off electoral threat. Votes are at hand, and Israel's tenacious brutality is not going down well in certain parts of the constituency. But the usual acknowledgments and doffing the cap to supporting Israel always follow.

The Vice President persists in reasserting her "unwavering commitment" to Israel's

sacrosanct right to defend itself. This is then coupled with the concern – as she expressed to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu – of “the scale of human suffering in Gaza, including the death of far too many innocent civilians”. (Harris-speak suggests that innocent civilians will always die in the cause.)

Cheap, calculated language follows.

“The images of dead children and desperate, hungry people fleeing for safety – sometimes displaced for a second, third, or fourth time – we cannot look away in the face of these tragedies. We cannot allow ourselves to become numb to the suffering, and I will not be silent.”

Eman Abdelhadi of the University of Chicago [finds such sentiments](#) from Harris parch dry, arguing that a lack of “an actual commitment to stop killing the children of Gaza” invalidates any claims to empathy.

“To be empathetic to someone that you’re shooting in the head is not exactly laudable. We don’t need empathy from these people. We need to stop providing the weapons and the money that is actively killing the people that they’re supposedly empathising with.”

Within the Democrats, there is some movement of disgruntlement, though this is the sort that rarely rises above the gravitas of paper ceremony and gesture. Thomas Kennedy, a figure who co-founded the Miami-Dade Democratic Progressive Caucus in early 2017, [wrote](#) for *The Intercept* earlier this year explaining why he had left the Democratic campaign in disgust.

“I am submitting my resignation in large part because of the Biden administration’s inexcusable support of Israeli war crimes and the mass killing of Palestinians in Gaza”. He also adds another reason: “the DNC’s role in protecting President Joe Biden from a democratic process that could check that complicity.”

A survey [available](#) from the Brookings Institution suggests that electoral tremors among Democratic voters regarding support for Israel’s ongoing campaign will be manageable. Bowman’s remarks that Israel is responsible for genocide tend to figure among a mere 7% of Democratic candidates. From the survey work done by the thinktank, 18% of the candidates took what was described as “a more moderate position, saying that the US should make support for Israel conditional and call for a ceasefire.”

The survey continues to note “a divide in the Democratic party, but the anti-Israel candidates compose only 2% of the primary winners. Outside the most extreme position, the party is split fairly evenly, with most candidates displaying sympathy for Israel, but hesitancy to voice full-throated unconditional support.”

In this show of performative grief for the plight of Palestinians, the Democrats can feign concern while still continuing the military and political support Israel has become so accustomed to. The result is one of theatre that does little to alter the catastrophe taking place in Gaza, leaving the political furniture virtually untouched.

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