



US Vice President Kamala Harris gestures happily as she formally accepts the Democratic presidential nomination on Day 4 of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) at the United Center in Chicago on August 22, 2024.
● KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS

Message from DNC Democrats do not care about Palestinians



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OPINION

The Democratic National Convention did not go well for supporters of Palestinian rights. The one positive to emerge from the DNC was that the first panel ever officially sanctioned by the DNC on the subject of Palestinian rights marked a major step forward politically, and was the result of a powerful grassroots movement to get Palestine mentioned in some official capacity at the Convention. But aside from that small but still significant victory, the Democrats were largely successful in burying their deep complicity in the genocide in Gaza. Protesters outside clashed occasionally with police, and some protesters inside the convention and some associated events caused brief disruptions, but little attention was paid to Gaza on the whole, either from the stage or in the media.

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That doesn't mean the political situation remained stagnant, however, even while Israel was continuing its merciless slaughter, targeting schools and other places of refuge. Unfortunately, the politics have taken an even grimmer turn, leaving little hope that the killing will end anytime soon. Taken together, the recent developments are a recipe for a genocide that will continue for months and ongoing regional escalation.

Gaza cease-fire talks are the new "Peace Process"

Despite the false optimism peddled by Joe Biden and his flunkies, the latest round of cease-fire talks, though ongoing, have already failed. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken collaborated with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to essentially destroy any chance of a cease-fire in the near term. Blinken announced what he termed "bridging proposals," to fill the gaps between Hamas and Israel based on the cease-fire proposal Biden presented at the end of May. Blinken did not address the question of why such proposals were necessary when Biden claimed that the plan he presented back then was actually an Israeli one. After that falsehood became too threadbare, he repeatedly claimed that Israel had accepted it.

Hamas, in fact, had long since stated it would accept the Biden proposal, as endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. Clearly, this was an unexpected turn for Netanyahu, who quickly set about creating new

conditions that Hamas couldn't possibly accept.

On Thursday, an Israeli official told the Times of Israel that Blinken's bridging proposals "meet Israeli security demands," which include continuing the genocide, after a brief pause, until Israel "reaches all of its war aims," and a continued Israeli presence along Gaza's border with Egypt, the so-called Philadelphi Corridor.

One hardly needs a degree in international affairs to recognize that these are not "bridging proposals," but are conditions Hamas couldn't possibly accept. Neither, it should be noted, would anyone else, whether a government or an armed group. Indeed, these conditions have even quietly undermined the triumvirate of the US, Qatar, and Egypt by directly challenging Egypt's stance, backed by two treaties, that Israel may not remain on the southern border. While neither country has loudly objected to the proposal, neither have they backed it. And Egypt has made it clear they will not accept it.

The idea that Israel would remain in the Philadelphi Corridor is an explicit violation of a 2005 agreement governing that strip of land, which forbids Israeli deployment there. Israel has called for scrapping that agreement entirely and revising the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Egypt has categorically refused these requests and warned that continued attempts to implement them could endanger the treaty entirely.

With the latest failure of cease-fire talks, the threat of an attack

on Israel from Iran, Hezbollah, Ansarallah, and the rest of the Axis of Resistance rises again. But the passage of time since the assassination of Hamas' lead negotiator Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran has given the United States the time it needed to re-deploy forces to bolster its naval and air defenses of Israel. This has the potential to render an attack on Israel, which remains highly likely, largely symbolic. But should the Axis decide that is insufficient, it also increases the risk that a more significant attack could spark a regional conflagration that the US could also be drawn into.

Diminishing hope for Harris

The refusal by the Democrats and the Kamala Harris campaign to have a Palestinian-American speaker address the DNC was just the latest misstep by a party that, even when it recognizes its need for progressive, Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian voters, cannot bring itself to confront its own devaluation of Palestinian lives, especially in Gaza.

This wasn't complicated. The Uncommitted Movement and other Palestinians and Palestine advocates in the party just wanted someone to speak to the audience about the suffering in Gaza and the need for a cease-fire. It could easily have been a moderate voice, one which aimed at the hearts of the audience, crafting a speech calling for an end to Israel's slaughter that even the pro-Israel wing of the party couldn't have overtly attacked. Instead, they froze Palestinians

out while giving the space to the parents of an Israeli-American captive, who, while both-sides-ing the conflict (quite understandable given the situation of their son) and very clearly focusing on the Israeli captives, showed more empathy for Palestinians in Gaza in their speech than just about anyone else at the convention. That is a shameful comment on the Democrats, on the Kamala Harris - Tim Walz ticket, and on the party as a whole, including many of its so-called progressive members. The decision to silence Palestinian voices while centering the awful suffering of an American Jewish captive and his family sends a strong message to the Democratic base that the lives of Israeli Jews matter just as much as they should while the lives of Palestinians matter not at all.

There was no political necessity for this. AIPAC and donors might have been unhappy about a Palestinian speaker, but they wouldn't have just dumped Democrats because there was concern expressed for civilians in Gaza. And that wasn't the only concerning signal from Harris at the DNC.

Haile Sofer, the CEO of the Jewish Democratic Council of America and Harris' former national security adviser, declared with confidence that Harris will never halt or condi-

tion military aid to Israel. She made the statement at an event sponsored by the American Jewish Committee on the sidelines of the DNC.

Sofer is a significant figure in both the Democratic Party and the Jewish community, and she does not have a reputation for making policy statements without any basis in fact. Her proximity to Harris lends this statement a good deal of credibility, even though she was not specifically speaking on Harris' behalf but merely giving her own estimation of Harris' views. She knows those views well since she helped shape them.

Somewhat less credible, but still very concerning, was Illinois Rep. Brad Schneider who told the same audience that Ilan Goldenberg, who was hired just last week by Harris as her liaison to the US Jewish community, told him that Harris will not try to re-enter the JCPOA, the Iran nuclear deal.

Schneider is a somewhat less reliable source. He is more given to bombastic statements, misunderstandings, and poor judgment than Sofer. He also has a reputation here in Washington for not always thinking much before he speaks. Moreover, the statement itself is widely open to interpretation, both in terms of what Goldenberg might have meant (he may well have been merely trying to assuage fanatical pro-

rael concerns over his own stance on Iran, for example) and in terms of how Schneider himself is reading it. In other words, it's a bit concerning, but it's far from certain that this reflects Harris' actual thinking on policy.

The trouble is, Harris isn't giving us any reason to hold out hope for a better Middle East policy than her current boss has. All the early signals are negative. The much-touted "empathetic tone" that Harris has tried to adopt is not only wearing thin and fading as time goes on, but it also reflects little more than a greater ability than Joe Biden has shown to deceive the American public with sweet-sounding words that thinly veil a genocidal policy in Palestine, a militaristic approach to Iran and the broader region, and pure indulgence of our criminal and brutal allies like Israel.

It is disappointing and dangerous that, in the face of progressives, Palestinians, Muslims, Arabs, and a whole lot of anti-genocide Jews and allies almost begging the Democrats to stop taking their votes for granted and just give them some reason to vote for Harris rather than just voting against Donald Trump, Kamala Harris is failing to get over even that remarkably low bar.

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US Secretary of State Blinken (L) meets with Israeli President Isaac Herzog in Tel Aviv on August 19, 2024, announcing that Israel has agreed to a "bridging proposal" put forward by the US.
● KEVIN MOHATT/POOL