

DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION 2024

Kamala Harris should change her Gaza policy



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The words "Palestine" and "Gaza" were missing a bit too much during the Democratic National Convention (DNC), which nominated the first female Black Democratic presidential nominee in history, in Chicago—the city with the largest population of Palestinian Americans in the United States. Widely popular former First Lady Michelle Obama said, "Hope is making a comeback," since Biden passed the torch to Kamala Harris. The Democratic Party has undeniably witnessed a new refreshing momentum, nostalgic of Barack Obama's first election campaign. But that hope she spoke of was not shared by roughly 30,000 pro-Palestine protesters—led in part by Palestinians and Jewish activists—who filled up the streets of Chicago and demanded that Harris earn their votes by ending the genocide in Gaza.

Pro-Palestinian delegates to the DNC, including Abbas Alawieh, an "uncommitted" delegate from Michigan, staged a sit-in protest outside the United Center. Prior to the DNC, the "Uncommitted Delegates" had been calling for campaign organisers to allow a Palestinian American to speak about Gaza, for a humble five minutes. Georgia state Rep Ruwa Romman, a Palestinian American Democrat, had drafted an appeal for unity, stating, "Let's commit to electing Vice-President Harris and defeating Donald Trump who uses my identity as a slur." The

meeting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, she said she would not be silent about Palestinian suffering. All that hope has been effectively squashed by her acceptance speech in the DNC, as she loudly carolled her commitment to "Israel's right to defend itself," which means the provision of weapons to continue carpet bombing Gaza and the ethnic cleansing of a devastated population under a manufactured "existential and security crisis" that Israel is purportedly facing, when in reality everyone can see it is what Palestinians are facing. Harris highlighted the sexual violence committed by the "terrorist organisation Hamas," and chose to stay silent about the sexual violence committed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) against Palestinian detainees—both men and women—documented by CNN and the United Nations. She called the situation in Gaza "heartbreaking," hypocritically eschewing that it is only the case because of the US's supply of lethal weapons to Israel's warmongering cabinet for the past 10 months.

Pragmatically, it is understandable that Harris cannot win a US election by going hardline against Israel. But her chances of winning by alienating those who care about Palestine are looking slimmer by the day. As Uncommitted Democrats take note of their censorship in the DNC, Green Party nominee Jill Stein, who has been a fierce critic of Israel's genocide, is reportedly choosing a Palestinian

The contrast between Stein and Harris so far suggests that Harris will definitely lose some voters over the issue of Palestine, even if Stein's bid to the White House is a long shot. Some people simply don't care if Donald Trump will win, more than they care about the inhumanity they have seen in Gaza where the Biden-Harris administration is complicit. Robert Francis Kennedy, Jr recently ended his campaign, endorsing Trump, but Stein

of a foreign security force that commits "gross violations" of human rights.

Most pro-Dem media outlets advance an agenda with their journalism, for many self-serving reasons, some of which are valid such as the fact that Donald Trump is a titanic threat to US democracy and press freedom. The media now understands that Biden's Gaza policy poses a significant problem for Harris, and she needs to distance herself from

administration's biggest failure.

As of August 26, Harris maintains a tight lead of 2.5 percent in Michigan polls over Trump, and in Pennsylvania, the second largest home for Arab Americans, she maintains a 1.1 percent lead based on 29 polls. These polls don't include Jill Stein, who could take up the percentage of the leads that Harris has over Trump. Another fact to note: polls are polls. They can never be blindly trusted



Democratic presidential nominee and US Vice-President Kamala Harris applauds from the stage on Day 4 of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) at the United Center in Chicago, Illinois, US on August 22, 2024.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Kamala Harris has a tiny lead over Trump in the swing states of Michigan and Pennsylvania. These polls also don't factor Green Party candidate Jill Stein, who will likely take up some progressive votes from Arab Americans and generally those who care about Gaza, and put Harris in the back foot. Polls can never be trusted blindly and Harris should not take it for granted—a lesson from Clinton's loss to Trump in 2016, where polls wrongly predicted an easy sweep across the country for the first female Democratic nominee.

draft was never vetted and all requests were denied.

On the other hand, the parents of Hersh Goldberg Polin, an Israeli American who lost part of his left arm and was taken hostage by Hamas during the October 7 attacks, spoke on the stage. The DNC's decision to provide space for only the Israeli side of the story, and not the Palestinian side, reflect the same-old prejudicial practices that have paved the way for Israel to commit a US-backed genocide with no end in sight.

Earlier in July, Kamala Harris had imparted hope regarding a shift from Joe Biden's disastrous policy on Gaza, when after

American as her running mate. Stein has made direct outreach to Palestinian Americans in Michigan, where Israel's genocidal war in Gaza has hit home with 390,000 Arab Americans. In this very key swing state, Harris made a blunder at a rally recently, when protesters chanted, "Kamala, Kamala, you can't hide! We won't vote for genocide!" What could've been a moment for her to express support and vow to take action, the vice-president snapped instead, saying, "If you want Donald Trump to win, then say that. Otherwise, I'm speaking," with an entitled stare. It is her job to convince voters to elect her instead of Trump, not the other way around.

told the *Newsweek* that she intends on staying in the race, that she will never back Kamala Harris, even if it means facing a repeat of accusations from Democrats that she contributed to a Trump victory. Voters appealing to a third party like Stein for being more progressive and humanitarian delivers a huge blow for Harris and a gift for Trump.

The liberal US media—which has shown its duplicity regarding the lives of Palestinians in Gaza since October 7 and have their fair share of complicity for parroting Israeli propaganda—has taken a U-turn of sorts. The *New York Magazine* now calls what is happening to citizens in Gaza "an ongoing genocide," for which Harris should end US support. Even *The New York Times*—who published a major uncorroborated report of gender-based sexual violence committed by Hamas on October 7—is now running op eds like "Harris can change Biden's policy on Israel by upholding the law" by Peter Beinart, where he argues that instead of an arms embargo, Harris, as a prosecutor, could uphold the law that prohibits the US from assisting any unit

to defeat Trump. Karen Attiah, a Black journalist in *The Washington Post*, wrote an article regarding the division between Black feminists on Harris regarding Gaza. Before the DNC, her words were clear: keeping silent on Gaza is too steep a price to pay for electing the first Black woman president.

As the DNC concluded, a letter to the editor was issued in response to Attiah's article, with the title, "Americans are choosing Harris or Trump, not Harris or Gaza." The writer argued, "Electing former President Donald Trump is a far greater existential threat to our country and the world, including Palestinians. Withholding votes from Ms Harris puts that outcome into play." The writer does not seem to realise that Harris herself has to say these words or devise a strategy out of it. The Harris campaign has steered clear from paying much attention to Donald Trump's insults—supposedly a learning lesson from Hilary Clinton's campaign—but she has to somehow assert that Trump would be even worse for Gaza, and that she will also be better than Biden, as it has been the current

and should not be taken for granted—a lesson from Clinton's loss to Trump in 2016, where polls wrongly predicted an easy sweep across the country for the first female Democratic nominee.

After a loud DNC, it seems that the US media has come to Harris's defence, to tame the moral outrage over Gaza and paint the whole week in a positive light for voters. CNN praised Harris, calling her "tough and defensive" of Israel, but also "compassionate" of Palestinians. But we've seen starved skeletons, dead children under rubble, a headless child, charred bodies, and dismembered human beings in plastic bags in the besieged strip. The US has sent Israel more weapons than humanitarian aid to Palestinians, and that's a hard pill to swallow. So mere "compassion" will not work. If Kamala Harris wants to lose to Donald Trump in November, then she should continue speaking and silencing Palestinian voices. Otherwise, she should start speaking to her campaign managers regarding how to change her rhetoric and policy on Gaza before it's too late.

India needs to pursue equal partnership with Bangladesh



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India is often portrayed as Bangladesh's closest ally. The two nations share a strategic partnership grounded in shared history, economic interdependence and strong cultural ties. However, this relationship has frequently been characterised by a power imbalance, with India being in a position to exert dominance over Bangladesh. If Bangladesh and India are to forge a more equitable friendship, three existing bilateral issues need to be addressed.

A vexing issue that has been in deadlock for decades is the disadvantages imposed on Bangladesh for being a lower riparian state. Even though the recent floods cannot solely be attributed to India opening the Dumbur dam, the situation serves as an eye-opener on our water-sharing agreements (or lack thereof), flood management capacity, and the need for bilateral negotiations where both countries can mitigate the damages from heavy rainfall without harming the other. Teesta River's water-sharing agreement is one example. If current trends continue, the Teesta water shortage could lower Bangladesh's rice production by roughly 8 percent by 2030 and 14 percent by 2050. This scarcity raises production costs and risks for farmers and also triggers social issues such as migration, displacement, and poverty.

Even though Sheikh Hasina's government allowed India several benefits, including the upcoming railway line that will allow the transport of goods and travel of passengers



Gautam Adani, founder and chairman of India's Adani Group, meets former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Gono Bhaban on July 15, 2023.

PHOTO: X/GAUTAM ADANI

(including military personnel) from India to its seven northeastern states via Bangladesh, Dhaka continues to be sidelined. Under Hasina's government, Dhaka had not been

able to leverage its concessions to India to make progress with Teesta or other shared rivers. The interim government now has an opportunity to address this issue and build strong political consensus for a more equitable and sustainable water-sharing and flood mitigation arrangement between the two neighbours.

The second issue is the border killings between India and Bangladesh. Despite the

Kendra, a human rights organisation in Bangladesh, conservatively reported that between 2013 and 2023, 332 people were killed by the BSF, averaging 30 deaths per year. Aside from the killings, the BSF has also subjected Bangladeshis at the border to gruesome torture and abductions. It makes little sense for two countries that share exemplary ties to allow such lethality on their border. Although the leadership in India pledged zero deaths, this reality is yet to materialise as state promises are unaligned with BSF actions at the border. If the previous home advisor's words are an indication, the Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB) will no longer remain passive and retreat in border conflicts in the face of aggression from the Indian side. But more importantly, it is pertinent for the interim government to address the crisis and catalyse strong political will from its Indian counterparts to end the killings and bring to book the BSF soldiers who engaged in prior misconduct that led to the loss of lives and lifelong injuries of Bangladeshis.

A third contentious point that requires a comprehensive reassessment is Adani's Godda power plant in Jharkhand which charges Bangladesh an exorbitant, above-market rate. The deal was initiated back in 2015 by Modi—who Adani's chairman is close to—and signed in 2017 with Hasina's blessing, despite the deal not being favourable for Bangladesh, as reported by *The Washington Post*.

Even though a report by the non-profit AdaniWatch suggested Bangladesh might have at least two ways to exit the contract, it turns out that Adani made sure to insert clauses that prevent Bangladesh from leaving even if Adani breaches the contract. First, private coal-fired power plants in India can export electricity if only India has a power surplus, which it currently does not. Second, the contract states that the Bangladesh Power Development Board

(BPDB) must pay a levy of taxes and duties that Adani itself is exempt from, especially since it was declared a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). BPDB was supposed to be officially informed of these changes for a price adjustment within 30 days, but Adani failed to do so. BPDB still went ahead with the contract, even fast-tracking it under the political compulsion of the Hasina government. Unfortunately, as *The Daily Star* pointed out, Bangladesh can only leave if Adani's breach of contract negatively impacts the latter's ability to produce electricity. As it stands, making unethical profits off the backs of Bangladeshi taxpayers will not be harming Adani's bottom line anytime soon.

Despite the ironclad agreement, there may be a way out. Unresolved disputes may be "settled in accordance with the Rules of Arbitration of the Singapore International Arbitration Centre, 2016, 6th Edition," according to a lawyer interviewed by *The Daily Star*. If such a pathway can be pursued, the interim government may probe into the matter to identify any scopes for dispute resolution. Getting out of this contract or renegotiating the prices would drastically minimise costs in a country that is already plagued with debts and dwindling foreign reserves.

Whether it's our riparian rights, contentious border killings, or power deals designed to empty Bangladesh's coffers, it is true that Bangladesh often gets the short end of the stick. But Bangladesh can leverage its advantage as a zone of influence for great power politics and make use of its concessions to its upper riparian neighbour to ensure the sustainable prosperity of its land and people. It is also in the best interest of both India and Bangladesh to ensure the survival and thriving of their long-lasting exemplary friendship—with transparency and broad political consensus benefitting both countries equally.