



## Anti-War Movement and Coalition Calling for a Gaza Ceasefire's Potential Influence on Harris's Policy Stances Towards Israel

With incumbent U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris being formally confirmed as her party's 2024 presidential nominee at this week's Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Chicago, a fair amount of attention has been paid to the potential influence that the ongoing anti-war movement and coalition calling for a Gaza ceasefire in the U.S. could have on Harris's policy stances towards Israel. The destructive Gaza War has become a significant issue of concern, particularly within the Democratic Party. Critics of the Biden administration's handling of it expressed their disapproval through large-scale demonstrations in Chicago amid the DNC, with anti-war activists seeing the convention as an opportune time to pressure Harris and the possible new administration regarding their policy positions. Support of Israel's devastating military operations despite overwhelming evidence of war crimes and human rights violations has justifiably fueled months of anti-war sentiment, and prompted many to advocate for changes in U.S. policy on moral, legal, and strategic grounds. In these three aforementioned areas, Israel's actions in Gaza have heinously killed tens of thousands of civilians and created a dire humanitarian crisis (moral), spurred cases over their illegality at both the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court (legal), and stoked an escalation in hostilities that have been detrimental to the prospects of maintaining regional peace and security (strategic). Thus, support of Israel's war efforts does not serve in the best national interest of the United States from several perspectives.

Due to all of this, it has been argued that there is a need for top political figures like Vice President Harris to not only acknowledge the legitimate discontent with U.S. policy towards Israel, but also implement concrete changes to it. Specifically, anti-war activists have taken issue with the United States' massive military and financial support of Israel's operations through the approval of billions of dollars' worth of U.S. weaponry – something that has persisted in spite of Israel's use of American munitions to commit human rights abuses and war crimes in Gaza. Critics of the weapons sales have outlined how a cessation in the flow of arms would prevent the mass killing of more innocent civilians and allow for the much-needed delivery of humanitarian aid. It could also be used as a point of leverage to force Israel to put an end to the war.

In order to lend credence to the valid reasoning behind growing objection to U.S. weapons sales to Israel, during the preceding months since the onset of the conflict in Gaza, anti-war and human rights advocates have been trying to underscore how aid to Israel violates the Leahy Law – which was designed to prohibit the United States from assisting any foreign entity that commits gross human rights abuses. The law was passed by U.S. Congress back in 1997, and observers have highlighted that it has been applied hundreds of times – including against U.S. allies – but seemingly with the biased exception of Israel even in light of glaring evidence of its war crimes and human rights abuses. Past U.S. State Department officials have acknowledged that their experience speaks to Israel receiving special treatment under the Leahy Law, despite some current spokespeople claiming otherwise. Former U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) – for whom the law is named after – has even expressed himself that the United States' lack of enforcement towards Israel “makes a mockery of the law.”

The national focus on the DNC and the presence of Harris and other influential elected officials encouraged anti-war activists to organize demonstrations, rallies, press conferences, and other activities around the Chicago area

this week. These were aimed at drawing attention to the importance of the need for a U.S. policy shift regarding Israel and the prominence of the anti-war movement among the American public. Activists also sought to voice opposition to the use of U.S. taxpayer dollars to fund Israel's increasingly criticized military operations in Gaza instead of for domestic improvements here at home in the United States. As such, they emphasized one of the movement's core calls for divestment from entities which have supported Israel's war efforts. Whether or not the wave of pressure yields tangible policy shifts remains to be seen, but what is undeniable at the moment is that opposition to the war is a key issue that certainly cannot be ignored and will continue to loom large over the Harris campaign moving forward.

Despite the demonstrated importance of the anti-war movement and the coalition calling for a Gaza ceasefire, the DNC refused to give them a platform on the main stage of the convention – in spite of the abundance of four days' worth of available speaking slots and programming. This is particularly regrettable given how the DNC seemed determined to provide a voice for such a diverse array of groups, yet glaringly omitted a movement which has garnered so much traction and momentum over the preceding months due to the widely criticized nature of Israel's devastating War on Gaza. As a result, the Democratic Party missed a golden opportunity to appease a significant segment of its base of supporters and keep everyone within its fold, and thus might yet pay a hefty price for this come Election Day in November.