



Amidst the "division among Democrats and the shift of voters"... Gaza War Threatens Biden's Prospects

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U.S. President Joe Biden is facing escalating internal divisions within his administration at the worst possible time, just months before the scheduled November elections, threatening his chances of winning a new presidential term.

A recent opinion poll showed that 57% of voters do not agree with Biden's handling of the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip.

The survey, conducted by The New York Times in collaboration with Siena College and published in late December, revealed a decline in Biden's approval ratings compared to previous months. Some young voters who supported Biden in the 2020 elections have decided to vote for former President Donald Trump.

Divisions among Democrats, especially younger and more critical voters of the U.S. administration, have intensified, particularly regarding Biden's handling of Israel. While some view the President's disregard for his base's opinions on the war as a significant mistake that could cost him dearly, others anticipate that his approach to the conflict may garner support in the elections.

Messages and Resignations

One notable sign of division within the U.S. administration is an unsigned letter written on January 3 by 17 members of Biden's re-election campaign. In the letter, they warn him of potential loss of votes due to his stance on the war, urging him to call for an immediate ceasefire and halt unconditional military aid to Israel.

This letter is the latest among similar messages that began in early November with over 1,000 employees of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), a government agency responsible for managing foreign aid. They urged Biden to pressure Israel to stop the ceasefire.

Another letter, signed by over 500 former members of Biden's 2020 presidential campaign in November, called for a ceasefire in Gaza. White House interns and congressional staff also sent messages with the same demand.

On January 4, Tarek Habbash, a senior official in the education ministry of Palestinian origin, resigned in protest of Biden's administration's handling of the war. This marks the second resignation in Biden's administration after Josh Bell, the Director of Public Affairs at the State Department, resigned on October 19 for the same reason.

In December, U.S. administration employees organized a protest in front of the White House in support of a ceasefire, covering their faces with scarves.

Richard Goodstein, former Special Envoy to the Middle East for President Bill Clinton, described the anonymous messages calling for a ceasefire as a "joke." In statements to Al-Sharq, he stated that Biden's position on Gaza and Hamas helps him in the elections. He added, "It's resolute, and that's what Americans want."

Goodstein called on those who disagree with the administration to resign, considering that a ceasefire allowing Hamas to fulfill its commitment to eliminate Israel and kill all Jews, in his words, will not happen.

A New Wing Supporting Palestine

In contrast, the Human rights lawyer and former Democratic House candidate Robert Pattillo considered that the U.S. President faces an almost impossible task of uniting the diverse wings of the Democratic Party and trying to fend off attacks from the Republican Party.

Pattillo told Al-Sharq that the Democratic Party was in a transitional phase from being a "centrist" party during the eras of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama to a "more progressive" party during the times of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. He explained that "the new, younger, and more progressive wing of the party strongly supports Palestine, while the older centrist wing supports Israel, contributing to the divisions."

Contradictory American Values

The former Director of Public Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, Josh Paul, who resigned in protest 12 days after the start of the war, told Al-Sharq that he does not regret his resignation, which he justified at the time out of fear of what might happen afterward.

In his resignation posted on LinkedIn, he wrote that the U.S. decision to expedite "providing more weapons to one side of the conflict is a short-sighted, destructive, and unfair decision that contradicts the very values we publicly embrace."

Paul added to Al-Sharq, "I have no doubt that I made the right decision; I cannot imagine the burden on my conscience at this stage if I had stayed."

On the other hand, Goodstein holds Hamas responsible for killing more than 23,000 Palestinians because it "slaughtered Israelis on October 7th." He also suggested that they might not have died if Hamas had not operated in tunnels under populated areas.

Wide Rejection of Supporting Israel

Biden's handling of the Israeli war in the Gaza Strip has been met with significant opposition from the American majority, especially Democrats and the youth, according to a survey conducted by CBS News network last month.

Biden's approval ratings dropped to low levels due to his handling of the war and his unconditional support for Israel.

Democratic Congresswoman Madinah Wilson Anton, representing Delaware, the state Biden served in the Senate for 36 years, described the president's decision to ignore his base and their opinions regarding his handling of the war on Gaza as a significant mistake.

She told "Al-Sharq" that President Biden's approval ratings continue to decline in polls among Democrats, especially among young voters, Muslims, and Arabs.

Foreign policy doesn't influence elections

Justin Logan, Director of Defense and Foreign Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, emphasized that foreign policy never decides the fate of US elections, including presidential ones, explaining that "the United States is extremely secure, far from danger to the extent that most voters do not choose a candidate based on this issue."

Logan told "Al-Sharq": "At this stage, if I were to make a prediction, I would stick to the assumption that if US forces are not directly dragged into war, and the United States does not suffer human losses, even comprehensive destruction and destabilization in the region are unlikely to negatively or positively affect US elections."

However, Logan paused at the impact of US support for the Israeli war on Gaza, especially after signs appeared that Muslim and Arab voters might distance themselves from the Democratic Party: "We still have to see if that will scare the administration and push it to change its policy."

Erosion of Arab support for Biden

US Arab support for Biden has sharply declined due to his approach to the war, posing a real threat to his election prospects, as Arab Americans constitute a decisive voting bloc in swing states such as Michigan, which helped him win in the 2020 elections.

In a poll conducted by the Arab American Institute at the end of October, Biden's approval dropped from 59% in 2020 to 17% currently, with 40% of those surveyed stating they would vote for Trump.

Democrat Robert Patello considered that divisions within the Democratic Party lead to a decline in Biden's support in polls among Muslim voters and the youth, and the quicker a peaceful solution is reached, the more time the administration has to help rebuild its reputation among these groups.

Arabs and the Dilemma of Trump's Election

However, Goodstein sees that "as accurate as opinion polls may be, there are a significant number of people who disagree with Biden because he does not do much for Israel, as much as those who believe that he has done a lot for it."

Goodstein presented his hypothesis, saying: "It's a binary choice, either Biden or Trump... it's that simple."

He emphasized that "Arab communities in the United States understand that it's that simple, no matter how much they oppose Biden's support for Israel. If they want him to lose, Trump wins. But if Arab communities become politically isolated, assisting Trump in winning, they will inflict harm on themselves for decades... it doesn't seem smart to me. And I know they are intelligent."

Goodstein questioned what Arab communities in the United States want: "Do Palestinians in the United States or those sympathetic to Palestine prefer Trump? The one who will give (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu the green light to do what he wants, and the green light for West Bank settlements? Who moved the US embassy to Jerusalem? And who never supported the two-state solution? Is electing Trump really a means for those who want to see the Palestinian state achieve their goals and aspirations?"

He added, "If that's what they want, not voting for Biden will achieve that for them. I hope they will be happy when Trump makes their lives miserable again. And I hope they will be happy when he imposes a ban on Muslims again and all the things he clarified, which Trump is sure to do."

Goodstein's hypothesis was rejected by Democratic Congresswoman Madinah Wilson Anton, condemning that when voters express their disagreement with Biden's handling of this issue, they are told that "Trump is worse."

She considered that the Democratic Party faces a real problem, as in every election, it tells voters, "These are the most important elections in your life," describing that approach as becoming boring.

She added, "We need to give voters a reason to go to the polls. We need to give them someone to vote for, not someone to vote against because Muslim and Arab voters feel that the party exploits them and abandons them... It is the party's responsibility, not the voters themselves, to recover these voters."

Insufficient Change in Biden's Tone

With increasing criticism of the US president's stance on the ongoing and intense Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip, and escalating divisions among Democrats, the administration has changed its tone. Last

month, Biden directed his harshest criticism to Netanyahu's right-wing government due to indiscriminate shelling, urging Israel to take steps to protect civilians.

However, US efforts to contain the humanitarian disaster in Gaza seem very weak without demanding a halt to the continuous ceasefire for the fourth month. Goodstein expected this to happen and that Biden would only call for a ceasefire "when Hamas no longer poses a threat."

However, Patillo noted that the escalating division and increasing pressure are already helping move towards a ceasefire in Gaza. He pointed out that the Biden administration called for a humanitarian truce and requested humanitarian relief for Palestinians. "Even at the United Nations, the Biden administration has worked to come up with settlement language to work towards ending the aggression while also putting conditions on future aid to Israel."

Madinah Anton agrees with Patillo that the Biden administration has changed its rhetoric slightly several times due to public pressure, but she considered the response to be "wholly inadequate."