

In This Moment: An Arab American Agenda

APRIL 2024

During his campaign for president in 2020, Joseph Biden committed his administration to defending the civil rights of Arab Americans and pledged to recognize the equal worth of Israeli and Palestinian lives. For these reasons and others, a majority of Arab Americans mobilized to support President Biden, helping him win key states like Michigan and Pennsylvania.

The events of the past several months have demonstrated a clear disregard for those commitments:

- After months of relentless Israeli assault on Gaza and military and settler raids in cities and towns across the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the Biden Administration has given military assistance, and political and diplomatic cover to Israel, enabling and aiding in the unfolding genocide in Gaza. Other than timidly urging restraint and calling for the protection of civilian lives, the Biden Administration has continued to provide Israel the munitions that have been used to kill Palestinian civilians and destroy homes, hospitals, cultural institutions, and infrastructure.
- American citizens have been murdered in the West Bank and Palestinian American citizens with property in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have been raided by armed settlers and seen their property destroyed. The Biden Administration has failed to protect Americans from Israeli violence or to bring the perpetrators of the violence against Americans to justice.
- Settler attacks and military raids on Palestinian refugee camps, towns and cities across the West Bank and East Jerusalem have seen a marked and dangerous increase in past months. Land theft, home demolitions, destruction of natural resources and infrastructure, and the abduction and the killing of Palestinians are ongoing without sufficient American leadership to stop them.
- Despite Israel's proven failure to meet the statutory requirements for entry into the US Visa Waiver Program, the Administration granted them admission. While the VWP requires that Israel ensure that all American citizens be allowed entry without discrimination as to their national origin, religion, or political beliefs, Israel violated that condition before admission and have continued to violate it since their entry into the program.
- Notwithstanding the demonstration of respect for our community during the 2020 campaign and some meaningful actions after taking office, the Administration has literally erased Arab Americans as a constituency in their engagement and outreach. The President has not met with Arab American community leaders, and the Biden Administration has subsumed our community under their Muslim outreach effort, denying us the right to define ourselves as a community or to be represented by our own leadership.

Given these facts, there is deep disappointment and anger among Arab Americans toward the callous neglect we and our concerns have received from this Administration. It is too late to save the more than 30,000 Palestinians who have been killed or the 70,000 who have been wounded in Gaza. However, it's not too late to save those innocents who will surely perish from bombings, disease, and starvation if the Israeli assault on Gaza is allowed to continue.

With regard to the situation in Gaza, at a minimum, the Administration must make a clear demand for: 1) an immediate ceasefire; 2) the return of all hostages and prisoners held without charges; 3) the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from all of Gaza; and 4) the unimpeded humanitarian assistance to reach the Palestinian population, including through UNRWA. The Administration must also cease arms shipments to Israel and initiate the rebuilding of the devastated Palestinian communities.

Additionally, we urge the Biden Administration take the following measures both at home and abroad. It will not be enough to undo the enormous damage that's been done, but it will at least demonstrate to Arab Americans that the Administration is listening and making an effort to restore some of the trust that has been lost.

Home: Protection of the Rights and Respect for the Identity of Arab Americans

- Demonstrate understanding and respect for the integrity of our non-sectarian Arab American community by meeting with our leadership and engaging our community as the proud ethnic, not faith-based, constituency that it is.
- Cease comments from Biden Administration officials, including the office of the press secretary, which contribute to a climate where Arab American advocates for Palestinian lives and rights are targeted or harmed.
- Defend Arab Americans and publicly speak out against the bullying, harassment, and intimidation they are experiencing, including in the workplace and on college campuses.
- Continue to prioritize the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes targeting the Arab American community.
- Publicly defend the First Amendment rights of Arab Americans, particularly our students, to express their support for Palestinian human rights without being defamed by false charges of antisemitism, charges enabled by a political agenda that seeks to conflate the very real problem of antisemitism with criticism of Israel or Zionism.
- Work to hold tech companies accountable for both allowing anti-Arab bigotry on their sites unabated and actively restricting or censoring pro-Palestinian speech on their platforms.
- Rescind Israel's admission into the Visa Waiver Program pending a full investigation of its adherence to the statutory requirements of the program, guaranteeing the equal protection of the rights of American citizens of Arab descent.

Abroad: Centering Arab American Interests and Concerns in American Foreign Policy

- Secure an immediate, permanent ceasefire in Gaza.
- Resume funding to UNRWA and increase US humanitarian aid and economic assistance to help the besieged Palestinian people suffering immeasurable hardship including, if necessary, US hospital ships that would provide urgent medical services.
- Reject Congressional restrictions on US funding to Palestinians based on potential action they may take at the United Nations (full membership as a state at the UN or pursuing justice via the International Criminal Court) by invoking the the national security waiver, if necessary.
- Compel Israel stop the violence perpetrated by its forces and settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including ceasing aerial bombardments, nightly raids, mass arrests, administrative detentions, land seizures, expulsions, and home demolitions.
- Subject any future military assistance to Israel to strict oversight to ensure that it is fully compliant with US law, international law, and human rights conventions.
- Secure justice for Arab American victims of Israeli violence, including the killing of American citizens, by demanding independent investigations and full prosecution of the perpetrators.
- Take concrete measures that reaffirm the US does not recognize Israel's illegal occupation and annexation of Palestinian territories and that the occupation must end to secure a lasting, enduring just peace for both Palestinians and Israelis.
- Take meaningful measures to secure Palestinians' freedom, equality, and prosperity rooted in full self-determination. Measures must include allowing United Nations Security Council recognition of Palestine as a state, reopening the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem, and the PLO mission in Washington.
- Cease US military escalations that are threatening the security and stability of the whole region, including the cessation of attacks on sovereign Arab nations.
- Work to deescalate the violence at the Lebanese-Israeli border to prevent a broader regional war, demanding Israel respect the territorial integrity of Lebanon.

CONVENED BY

