

War in Gaza casts shadow over DNC opening

by [Yonat Shimron](#)

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Protesters march to the Democratic National Convention after a rally at Union Park, August 19, in Chicago. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

Flush with excitement at the nomination of Kamala Harris to the top of its presidential ticket, the Democratic National Convention opened at Chicago's United Center on Monday, projecting energy and emphasizing unity.

But for many faith-based activists, the convention will be a culmination of months of activism and protest against the war in Gaza, and in the days before the highly anticipated convention, they have done their best to cast a shadow on this week's proceedings.

While many mainstream Jewish groups are looking for reassurance that a President Harris will continue President Joe Biden's unflagging support for Israel in its war against Hamas, an array of Muslim groups spent the past weekend planning a series of protests urging Harris and the Democratic ticket to end military aid to Israel. Many of these protests will be supported, and attended, by liberal Jews and Christians.

On Monday, protesters had begun gathering in Union Park in Chicago, about a half-mile from the DNC headquarters, with "Abandon Harris '24" signs and "Stand with Palestine."

Early reports appeared to show only about [2,000 protesters](#) at Chicago's Union Park, according to police, not the tens of thousands that had been promised.

Cornel West, the independent presidential candidate and theologian, addressed the crowd calling for an end of the war in Gaza.

Some groups began rallying around the country in advance of the convention before heading to Chicago. On Sunday, the Action Network sponsored a series of rallies under the banner "Not Another Bomb" in [dozens of cities nationwide](#), including New York, Boston, and Los Angeles.

"We are calling on our elected representatives to do more than put empty rhetoric into their demands for peace in the Middle East," said Emerson Goldstein, a Jewish Voice for Peace member at a rally in Durham, North Carolina, on Sunday that drew about 200 people. "Stop the flow of arms to Israel."

Pro-Israel activists are also on hand in Chicago and will mount a "[Hostage Square](#)" [exhibit](#) on a private lot near the convention center. Organized by the Israeli American Council, the exhibit will spotlight the hostages being held in Gaza. Relatives of hostages are also expected to attend the convention.

The 10-month-old war has killed more than 40,000 Palestinians, according to officials in Gaza, in what those on the ground and international human rights observers have described as a genocide backed by US bombs and munitions that have helped to flatten the Gaza Strip and left thousands homeless.

The Coalition to March on the DNC, an umbrella organization coordinating several of the marches and protests, is composed of more than 170 groups, each with its own causes, whether immigration, reproductive health care or LGBTQ+ rights. But as a whole, the groups have coalesced to demand an end to US aid to Israel and to stand

up for Palestinians.

While the Biden administration has been pushing hard this week to bring the warring parties to a cease-fire agreement and relieve pressure on the convention, there have been no signs that either the current administration or a Harris White House would try to curb Israel's war plans. The Harris campaign said last week that the vice president does not support an arms embargo on Israel. The Democratic National Convention's [2024 platform](#), released Monday, also reaffirms the party's commitment to providing Israel military assistance.

The 92-page non-binding platform reiterates a commitment to "Israel's security, its qualitative military edge, its right to defend itself."

Over the past week, the coalition fought city officials over protest details, including the length of a march route, which restricts marchers to just more than a mile of permitted space, about half of what the coalition requested. After at first denying the activists a sound system, the city relented.

Inside the convention center, delegates representing Democratic voters who cast "uncommitted" ballots in the party's primaries over Biden's support for Israel are also pressing their case.

More than 30 of the 3,932 Democratic delegates are expected to vote uncommitted for Harris.

Across the country some 700,000 Democratic voters cast ballots in the Democratic primaries reading "uncommitted," most to oppose Biden's unconditional support for Israel.

Ramah Kudaimi, a native of the Chicago suburbs and a Muslim who helped organize a protest called a "Peace Bombing" at the National Mall on Friday, said the Palestinian cause is one she is passionate about.

"To me, the issue of justice, and speaking about oppression and acting against oppression, is such a big part of Islam," said Kudaimi, who was headed to Chicago. "My hope is that Democrats do not leave Chicago without truly understanding what they're risking if they do not call for an arms embargo now. There is no way we're going to defeat fascism if we continue to fund genocide." —Religion News Service

Reina Coulibaly contributed to this report.