

More Than 400 U.S. Officials Sign Letter Protesting Biden's Israel Policy

The signers, representing some 40 government agencies, reflect growing internal dissent over the administration's support of Israel's military campaign in Gaza.

By Maria Abi-Habib, Michael Crowley and Edward Wong
New York Times

More than 400 political appointees and staff members representing some 40 government agencies sent a letter to President Biden on Tuesday protesting his support of Israel in its war in Gaza.

The letter, part of growing internal dissent over the administration's support of the war, calls on the president to seek an immediate cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and to push Israel to allow humanitarian aid into the territory. It is the latest of several protest letters from officials throughout the Biden administration, including three [internal memos to Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken](#) signed by dozens of State Department employees as well as an open letter signed by more than 1,000 employees of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The signatories of the letter submitted on Tuesday and the one circulating among USAID employees are anonymous, the USAID letter explains, out of "concern for our personal safety and risk of potentially losing our jobs." The signatories of the State Department dissent cables must disclose their names, but those cables have not been released publicly.

Although the Biden administration has recently started voicing concern over the high numbers of Palestinian civilians killed while urging Israel to show restraint, that budding criticism does not appear to be placating many in the U.S. government.

The letter, a copy of which was reviewed by The New York Times, began by denouncing the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas, then urged Mr. Biden to stop the bloodshed caused by Israel's retaliatory military campaign in Gaza.

"We call on President Biden to urgently demand a cease-fire; and to call for de-escalation of the current conflict by securing the immediate release of the Israeli hostages and arbitrarily detained Palestinians; the restoration of water, fuel, electricity and other basic services; and the passage of adequate humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip," the letter states.

Two political appointees who helped organize the letter to Mr. Biden said the majority of the signatories are political appointees of various faiths who work throughout government, from the National Security Council to the F.B.I. and the Justice Department.

Some of the signatories helped Mr. Biden get elected in 2020 and said in interviews they were concerned that the administration's support of Israel's war in Gaza clashed with Democratic voters' stance on the issue.

"The overwhelming majority of Americans support a cease-fire," the letter states, [linking to a poll](#) from October that shows that 66 percent of Americans, including 80 percent of Democrats, believe the United States should put pressure on Israel for a cease-fire.

"Furthermore, Americans do not want the U.S. military to be drawn into another costly and senseless war in the Middle East."

Israel launched a ground invasion last month in Gaza in response to bloody attacks by Hamas on Oct. 7 that killed about 1,200 people, according to the Israeli government. So far, more than 11,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military offensive according to Gaza's health ministry.

Mr. Biden and Mr. Blinken, like Israel's leadership, say they oppose a cease-fire — a long-term halt in fighting, typically accompanied by political negotiations — on the grounds that it would spare Hamas and allow it to reconstitute for future attacks. They have instead [called for "pauses,"](#) short interruptions in the fighting lasting perhaps a few hours, to allow for clearly defined humanitarian missions like aid delivery into Gaza and the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas. U.S. officials say they have done more than any other nation to ensure that at least some aid enters Gaza.

The two people who helped organize the letter to Mr. Biden said they had agreed to serve the administration because the president stressed that he wanted a government that was more representative of American voters. But, they said, their concerns and those of other political appointees have largely been dismissed.

Some U.S. officials said privately that while senior officials welcome disagreement, government workers must understand and accept that they will not always agree with U.S. policy. The dissent over Gaza reflects a generational divide and comes mostly from employees in their 20s and 30s, the officials said — though many older people have also signed dissenting documents, according to people who have collected signatures.

The letters of protest come after a contentious meeting on Oct. 23 at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, where 70 Muslim and Arab political appointees gathered with senior Biden administration officials, including Jeffrey D. Zients, the chief of staff, and Doug Emhoff, the husband of Vice President Kamala Harris.

The meeting started with a general question: How many of the appointees have faced pressure from family or friends to resign over the Biden administration's support of

Israel in the conflict? Dozens of hands shot up, according to one attendee and another who was briefed about the meeting.

Senior administration officials opened the floor to take questions and comments. Some attendees cried as they demanded that the administration call for a cease-fire, curb weapons shipments to the Israeli military and stop disregarding Palestinian civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip.

The State Department memos to Mr. Blinken were cables sent internally, through what is known as the dissent channel. The channel was created during the Vietnam War to encourage department employees to share disagreements with official policy. Under State Department rules, dissenters are protected from retaliation.

On Monday, Mr. Blinken responded to the internal dissent in a message emailed to department employees. “I know that for many of you, the suffering caused by this crisis is taking a profound personal toll,” he wrote, adding that he was aware that “some people in the department may disagree with approaches we are taking or have views on what we can do better.”

He added: “We’re listening: What you share is informing our policy and our messages.”