

# **BIDEN'S TIMING: UNDERCUTTING BIBI**

There are many things that explain the timing of President Biden's decision to drop out of the race. Most importantly, after staying reasonably steady with Trump in the polls, the combined weight of the Democratic firing squad, and – probably – some bounce from the shooting attempt on Trump had started a real hemorrhaging in Biden's polling. He had to drop when he did to stave off a collapse in the polls.

His former colleagues in the Senate were prepping to move en masse against him. He had asked Chuck Schumer for a week to consider Schumer's warning, and time was up.

His COVID diagnosis likely gave him a few days to reflect on the decision before him.

Biden almost certainly didn't base his timing on Bibi Netanyahu's visit this week (though he deferred explaining it for a few days, which may put that address after Bibi's). But the timing is wildly auspicious.

While he remains a wildly successful President, Biden dropped out of the race because his age prevents him from running effectively. They are different skills. His age benefits the former but hinders the latter.

But Biden's policies on Gaza were the primary thing that cut what otherwise might have been a natural lead on Trump. It's not that Biden is popular. It's that Trump is so unpopular a Democrat should start out ahead. Or should have, before Israel started slaughtering Palestinian civilians. Some of the activists that have most aggressively targeted Biden are claiming credit (inaccurately, but they should claim credit anyway) for his decision to drop out.

And among Biden's most stubborn beliefs was not that he was the best candidate to beat Trump, but that he could reason with – that he could

moderate – Bibi. It was a foolish belief born of a lifetime of dealing with the man. It was perhaps a naive blindness to the way that Bibi has repeatedly shivved Democrats in the back, not least when Trump first partnered with Russia during the 2016 transition to undermine Obama's effort to rein in West Bank settlements.

I've long expected Bibi's visit to be part of some partisan attack on Biden, replete with a continued unwillingness to consider ceasefire deals because Bibi is less worried about Israeli and US hostages than he is about retaining power. I fully expect Bibi to yoke his own political future to that of Donald Trump.

But the timing of the visit, coming as it is when Kamala Harris will be more focused on making calls and wooing endorsements, undercuts much of the power of it.

While the Vice President is scheduled to meet with Bibi, separately from Biden, I can't imagine anyone will expect her to play a major role in this week's events.

And that provides her space.

I don't expect that she'll disavow Biden's failed Israeli policies, least of all when he is still pursuing a ceasefire. At least not yet.

But because Bibi's visit will occur when everyone expects Harris to be focused on other things, it's about the one way that she'll get a pass on the inevitable centering of Israel in US politics.

Kamala does have distance from Biden on Gaza. She was the person to whom many activists have expressed their dismay. And that distance gives her options going forward.

In virtually every other scenario, Kamala would be tied to a Biden policy that has been deeply unpopular among Democrats. But because of the timing, she may be able to keep that distance.

Update: Some of the Biden staffers who quit over his Gaza policy are speaking favorably about

Kamala.

Update: Kamala refused (er, um, declined) to  
preside over Bibi's joint session.