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What if the U.S. Ceased Providing Military Aid to Israel?



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Introduction

A recent statement from the European Union Foreign Policy Commissioner, Josep Borrell, urging Israel's allies, notably Washington, to cease supplying weapons to Israel has ignited widespread controversy. This call comes amid heightened concerns over the significant civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip.¹ Coinciding with this plea, a Dutch appeals court decision has prohibited the export of all spare parts for F-35 fighter jets destined for Israel.² These developments unfold against the backdrop of Israel's plans to initiate an expanded military operation in Rafah. Such an operation raises the spectre of a potential humanitarian catastrophe, particularly concerning the over 1.3 million displaced individuals from the Gaza Strip who have sought refuge in Rafah since the commencement of military activities in the enclave.³

The United States provides Israel with annual military aid worth \$3.8 billion, which stands as one of the most substantial military aid packages supplied by the U.S. to any country globally. This commitment was reaffirmed by U.S. officials, including President Joseph Biden, who, during his tenure as Vice President under Barack Obama, emphasised the enduring strategic alliance between the two countries. Then Vice President Biden said the U.S. commitment to Israel transcends moral obligations and is a deeply rooted strategic obligation. During a visit to Tel Aviv amid the events of Oct. 7, he underscored that "the existence of an independent and secure Israel within globally recognised borders aligns with the practical strategic interests of the United States." He further emphasised, "I have long said: If Israel didn't exist, we would have to invent it."⁴ Evidence of the depth of relations and continued support is further demonstrated by Congress' approval of an additional \$14.1 billion in military aid to Israel. This aid is intended to bolster Israel's capabilities in its conflict with the Hamas movement, specifically by providing air and missile defence support and replenishing U.S. military stock granted to Israel. This level of support echoes the assistance provided by the United States to Israel during the October 1973 War with the Egyptian Army.

The generous and unconditional support provided by the U.S. to Israel prompts numerous inquiries, particularly in the context of the U.S.'s inability to exert pressure on Israel to stop its war on Gaza. Additionally, its loss of control over the right-wing government's decision-making process regarding the potential expansion of the war to include Rafah, portending an imminent conflict with Egypt. Hence, this analysis endeavours to address a pivotal question: Will these developments prompt a shift in the U.S. stance toward Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing government, potentially leading to a withdrawal from the notion of an expanded operation in Rafah? Furthermore, can the United States feasibly cease its military aid to this strategic ally in the Middle East?

History of U.S. Support for Israel

U.S. support for Israel traces back to the early 1950s, initially comprising small grants that gradually expanded over the following decade. This assistance diversified to include Export-Import Bank loans, food-for-peace aid, and general economic loans, cumulatively amounting to nearly \$160 billion in economic and military support.⁵ Notably, military loans commenced after the 1967 war and were eventually replaced entirely by grants in 1985. Concurrently, U.S. economic aid witnessed a substantial increase in subsequent years, with grants supplanting loans for economic assistance by 1981. In recent years, annual U.S. support to Israel has remained stable at approximately \$3.8 billion in military and economic grants, supplemented by over \$500 million from other parts of the budget or external sources.

Israel has been granted unprecedented exceptions in terms of U.S. economic aid. Unlike most recipients of such aid, who are typically obligated to allocate most funds toward specific projects, such as purchasing U.S. agricultural surpluses or finished goods, Israel possesses the unique privilege of depositing its aid directly into the government treasury. While in other countries, U.S. Agency for International Development officials oversee the implementation of programmes, either directly through NGOs or in collaboration with government agencies, Israel has been an exception since 1971. In Israel's case, the U.S. government establishes the level of funding, effectively transforming the aid into cash transfers directly to the Israeli government.

1. الشرق (2024). «بوريل يحض حلفاء اسرائيل على وقف تزويدها بالأسلحة». 12 فبراير 2024.

2. سكاى نيوز عربية (2024). «محكمة تأمر سلطات هولندا بوقف تسليم إسرائيل قطع غيار 'إف-35'». 12 فبراير 2024.

3. وتد، محمد (2024). «جتياح رفح.. خلافات داخل إسرائيل وتساؤل عن التنسيق مع مصر». 11 فبراير 2024.

4. الجزيرة نت (2023). «بايدن من تل أبيب: لو لم تكن هناك إسرائيل لعملنا على إقامتها». 18 أكتوبر 2023.

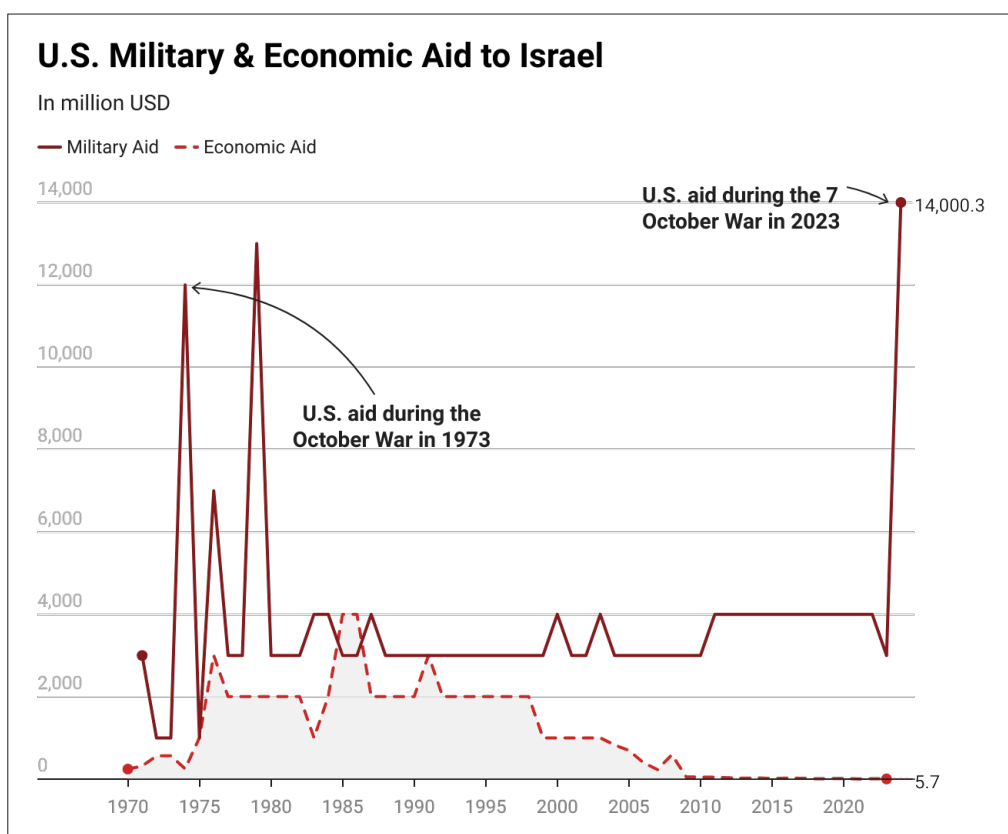
5. "Total U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel (1949-Present)." n.d. 2024. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/total-u-s-foreign-aid-to-israel-1949-present>.

Following a decline in U.S. economic aid in the mid-2000s, U.S. support for the Israeli army intensified, solidifying the United States as a strategic military ally in the Middle East. This shift was facilitated through a series of strategic memorandums of understanding (MoU), some spanning up to 10 years in duration. The most recent was signed in 2016, whereby the United States committed to providing \$38 billion in military aid spanning the fiscal years 2019-2028, as illustrated in Table (1). Predominantly, U.S. aid takes the form of arms grants. Consequently, over 80% of Israel's arms imports from 1950 to 2020 originated from the United States. This extensive support has afforded Israel access to the world's most advanced military equipment, including the F-35 fighter jet.

Table (1): Evolution of U.S. Military Support for Israel from 1999 to 2028

Period	Military funding granted to Israel
1999 - 2008	\$2.1 billion
2009 - 2018	\$3 billion
2019 - 2028	\$3.8 billion

The pattern of U.S. aid to Israel unveils significant insights. Following the 1967 war, U.S. aid surged by 450%, a development correlated with Israel's willingness to furnish the United States with samples of new Soviet weaponry captured during the war. Similarly, military aid experienced an 800% increase after the October War of 1973. These escalations aligned with the British decision to withdraw its forces from "East of Suez," prompting extensive arms sales and logistical cooperation with the Shah of Iran.



Source: Virtual Jewish Library

Aid to Israel underwent another quadrupling in 1979, following significant geopolitical shifts such as the fall of the Shah of Iran, the election of the right-wing Likud government, and the ratification of the Camp David Accords. These accords included provisions to increase military aid, transforming it into more of a tripartite military agreement rather than a simple bilateral one. Further increases in aid occurred shortly after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. In 1983 and 1984, the United States and Israel solidified their strategic cooperation through MoUs and military planning, culminating in their inaugural joint naval and air military exercises. As a result, Israel was granted an additional \$1.5 billion in economic aid. Additionally, it received half a million dollars earmarked for developing a new fighter jet.

During and immediately following the Gulf War, U.S. aid to Israel experienced a further increase of \$650 million. Subsequently, when Israel significantly escalated its repression in the occupied territories, including incursions into the autonomous Palestinian territories outlined in treaties guaranteed by the U.S. government, U.S. aid responded accordingly by escalating further. This trend persisted, with aid rising again in the aftermath of 9/11. The trajectory of aid reflects a dynamic correlation: as Israel strengthens and demonstrates greater willingness to collaborate with U.S. interests, the level of support from the United States intensifies correspondingly.

U.S. military aid to Israel encompasses various forms, with the majority provided as grants under the Foreign Military Financing Programme. This programme obligates the United States to annually finance Israel with \$3.8 billion in foreign military assistance, constituting the most extensive package of its kind. These foreign military resources are provided by the United States annually, amounting to approximately 16% of the Israeli defence budget alone.

Out of the current annual allocation of \$3.8 billion, \$500 million is earmarked for missile programmes sponsored by the Pentagon budget. The remaining \$3.3 billion in military aid is sourced from the State Department's budget, specifically through the Foreign Military Financing Programme.⁶ This financing mechanism effectively functions as a multibillion-dollar gift card for Israel, designated exclusively for the procurement of U.S.-made weapons and other materials each year.

Israel enjoys distinct privileges regarding using military financing, notably through “cash flow financing.” This mechanism enables Israel to finance multi-year acquisitions using military funding without the obligation to pay the entire acquisition costs upfront. Additionally, a portion of the funding assistance is allocated to purchasing equipment from Israeli defence companies, a benefit not afforded to other recipients of U.S. military aid. Furthermore, Israel can procure directly from U.S. manufacturers using direct trade sales.

Forms of U.S. Military Support

Military support for Israel takes many forms, the most prominent of which can be explained as follows:

Joint Military Training and Manoeuvres

Alongside financial aid, Israel and the United States engage in numerous joint military exercises and manoeuvres. Notably, the most recent manoeuvre, Juniper Oak, took place in Jan. 2023, the largest U.S.-Israeli military manoeuvre. This manoeuvre can be summarised as follows:

Joint Naval Trainings*

- Noble Dina, a joint trilateral training involving the United States, Israel, and Greece. This training is specifically designed to enhance capabilities in Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), Search and Rescue (SAR), Air Defence, Anti-Piracy, and Anti-Terrorism & Force Protection (ATFP).
- Noble Melinda, a trilateral naval training involving the United States, Israel, and France. This training primarily focuses on Mine countermeasures (MCM) and enhancing interoperability between Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams.
- Noble Shirley, a joint arms training between the United States and Israel, with a specific focus on enhancing capabilities in amphibious operations.
- Intrinsic Defender, a bilateral training initiative to foster cooperation between naval forces and enhance operational readiness.
- Mighty Waves, a multilateral naval training spearheaded by the U.S. and Israel. It concentrates on SAR operations and ATFP, incorporating damage control and medical scenarios. The training places a significant emphasis on skill sharing at the tactical level.

6. It is a grant program used to purchase U.S. military equipment and services.

Joint Air Trainings**

- Joint Red Flag manoeuvre between the United States and Israel, conducted in March 2023.
- Tri-Lightning 2, F-35 fighter manoeuvre conducted in Israel in June. 2021.
- Juniper Cobra, a joint training conducted by the U.S. Army with its Israeli counterpart, focusing on coordinated operations of anti-aircraft systems, including Arrow anti-ballistic missile interceptors, and Patriot missile air defence batteries, conducted in March 2023.

Joint Air Defence Training

- U.S.-Israeli missile defence manoeuvre conducted in Sept. 2023.
- Juniper Falcon, a joint manoeuvre initiated by the Israel Defence Forces and U.S. Central Command, concentrating on air defence, cybersecurity, intelligence, and logistics, conducted in Feb. 2023.
- Joint air defence manoeuvres conducted in Oct. 2009.

Other Military Trainings***

- Juniper Oak, the largest U.S.-Israeli military manoeuvre, conducted in Jan. 2023.
- A U.S.-Israeli manoeuvre conducted in preparation for a potential War in Lebanon, conducted in June 2023.
- Blue Guardian, the world's inaugural international drone training, took place in July. 2021.
- Juniper Falcon 21, conducted in Feb. 2021.
- Juniper Falcon 19, conducted in Feb. 2019.
- Juniper Cobra 16, conducted in Feb. 2016.
- Juniper Falcon 11, conducted in Oct. 2010.
- Juniper Cobra-X, conducted in Oct. 2009.
- The 69th Air Defence Artillery Brigade conducted training with the Israeli Army in Nov. 2005.
- The United States deployed forces in Israel in anticipation of a potential war with Iraq in Jan. 2003.

* U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa / U.S. Sixth Fleet. n.d. "Europe." <https://www.c6f.navy.mil/About-Us/Exercises/Europe/>.

** "U.S.-Israel Joint Air Force Training." n.d. (2024). <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/us-Israel-joint-air-force-training>.

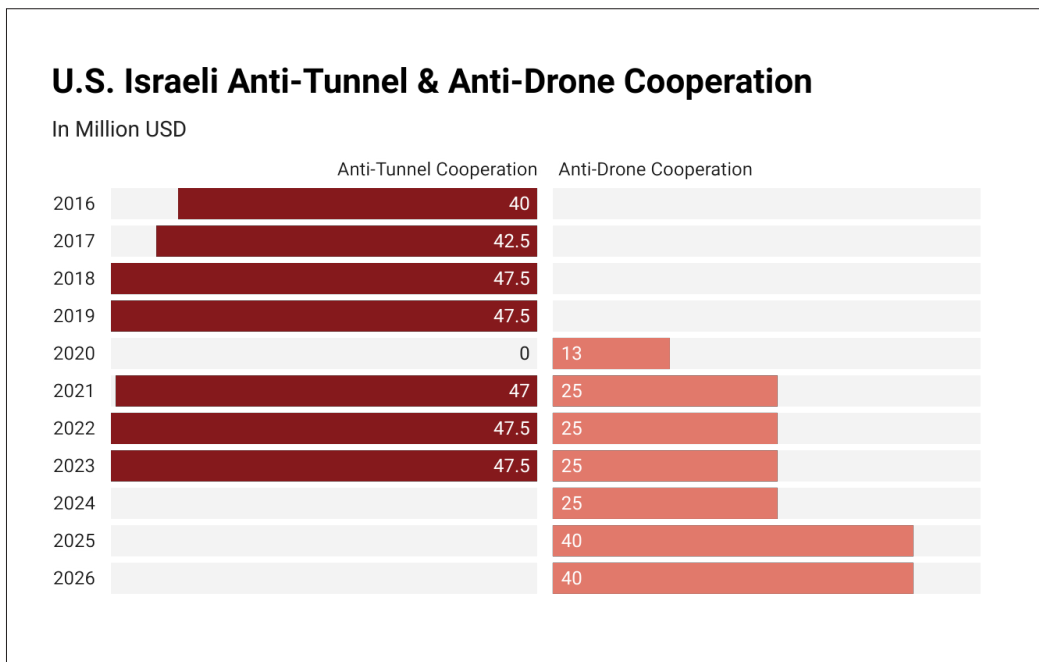
*** "U.S.-Israel Strategic & Military Cooperation Table of Contents." n.d. (2024). <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/u-s-israel-strategic-and-military-cooperation>.

Defence Programme Against Tunnels and Drones

Cooperation between the United States and Israel commenced in 2016, focusing on countering tunnels by developing a detection system for underground smuggling tunnels. This initiative aimed to address the tunnels utilised by Hamas for infiltration during the 2014 War. The technology relied on acoustic sensors and detection algorithms designed to identify holes, drawing from techniques utilised in the oil and natural gas sectors.

Coordination in this context occurs under the National Defence Authorisation Act’s umbrella through establishing a cooperation programme between the United States and Israel to detect and confront tunnels. This law also authorised the use of funds from the Department of Defense research, development, testing, and evaluation, in cooperation with Israeli funds, to establish counter-tunnel capabilities that detect, monitor, and neutralise underground tunnels that threaten the United States and Israel. This authorisation requires the Secretary of Defense to submit a report to Congress that includes sharing research and development costs between the two countries. Through this cooperation, Israel was able to discover Hamas tunnels at depths of up to 230 feet underground. In 2021, Israel was able to build an anti-tunnel barrier represented by a barrier made of a concrete wall buried underground and equipped with sensors along the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip, which extends 40 miles.⁷

Regarding the Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (CUAS) Defence Programme, Congress authorised the first-ever U.S.-Israeli Cooperative Counter-UAS programme by expanding the 2019 Counter-Tunnel Cooperation Programme scope. This was established under a separate authority, Section 1278, which empowered the Secretary of Defense to conduct joint research, development, test, and evaluation activities with Israel to establish capabilities for CUAS threatening the United States or Israel. Section 1278 mandates a matching contribution from the Government of Israel and sets the annual U.S. contribution at \$25 million. Congress initially approved the programme through fiscal year 2024. However, the programme authorisation was later amended to include “directed energy capabilities” and raised the maximum annual U.S. contributions to the programme from \$25 to \$40 million until 2026.⁸



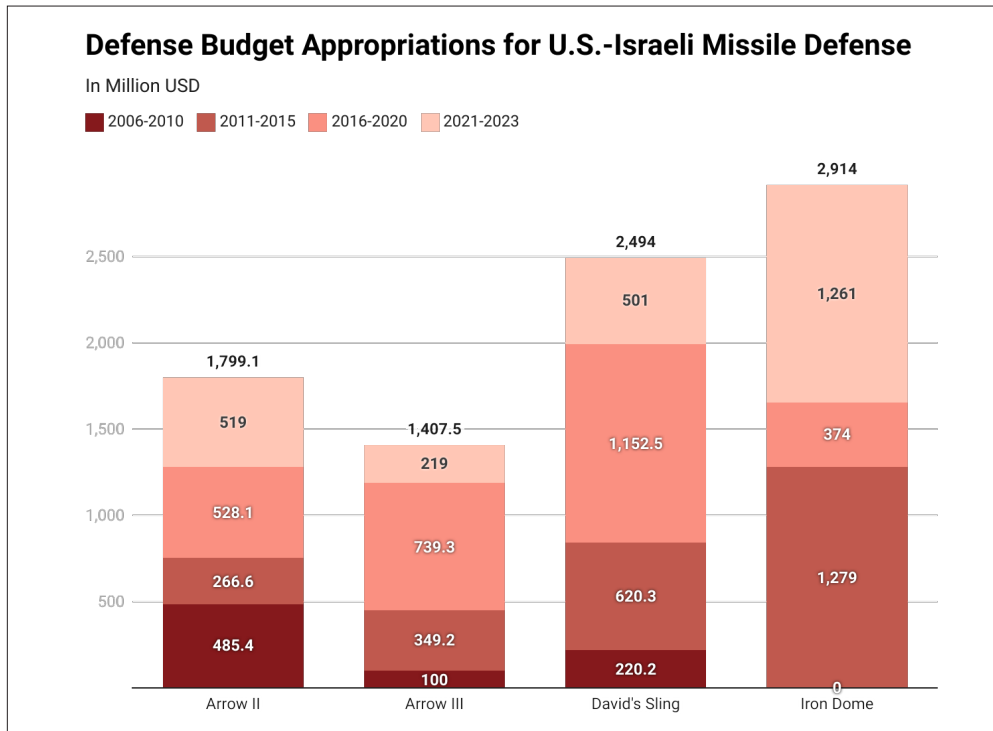
Source: United States Agency for International Development (USAID); Congressional Research Service.

7. 230 feet down: Elite IDF unit reveals deepest Hamas tunnel ever found | The Times of Israel. (2022, April 2). The Times of Israel. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/230-feet-down-elite-idf-unit-reveals-deepest-hamas-tunnel-ever-found/>

8. Thornberry, William M. (2021). “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021.” Authenticated U.S. Government Information. Accessed February 18, 2024. <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ283/PLAW-116publ283.pdf>.

Israeli Air Defence System Development Programme

Israel also benefits from U.S. assistance in joint procurement for developing missile defence systems. Under the current MoU between the two parties, \$5 billion is pledged throughout the arrangement for various missile defence programmes, often developed or produced in collaboration with U.S. companies. This encompasses investments in Israel's Iron Dome short-range air defence system and other longer-range platforms such as Arrow II, Arrow III, and David's Sling. Between fiscal year 2006 and fiscal year 2023, the United States allocated over \$8.6 billion to various U.S.-Israeli missile defence programmes.



Source: United States Agency for International Development (USAID); Congressional Research Service.

Additionally, \$500 million is allocated annually to Israeli and joint U.S.-Israel missile defence programmes, facilitating collaboration in the research, development, and production of systems utilised by Israel, such as the Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow. While Iron Dome was initially developed solely by Israel, the United States has been a production partner since 2014. For instance, U.S. military contractor Raytheon manufactures Tamir interceptor missiles for Israel's Iron Dome at its facilities in Arizona.⁹

American Support in the Wake of Oct. 7

This is not the first time the United States has sided with Israel in times of war. Following the surprise Egyptian-Syrian attack in 1973, the massive American air bridge to Israel was a major factor that enabled the latter to repel the attack on both fronts. In 1991, during the First Gulf War, when Israel faced approximately 40 Iraqi missiles, the Yitzhak Shamir government opted for a non-responsive stance, not indicative of weakness but somewhat reflective of a deliberate consideration of the pronounced American interest in the matter. The imposition of this constraint held significant importance for the United States, as it had the potential to impact the U.S. conduct and management of the conflict with Saddam Hussein during that war. This, in turn, led to two outcomes: firstly, the U.S. military integrated potential intended Israeli responses into U.S. operational planning, and, secondly, at a deeper level, Israeli restraint demonstrated that it could be relied upon as a strategic U.S. ally in times of crisis. This has strengthened the strategic partnership between the two countries during Yitzhak Rabin's tenure, starting with President George H.W. Bush in 1992 and then with President Bill Clinton until now.¹⁰

9. Masters, Jonathan. (2024). "U.S. Aid to Israel in Four Charts." *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 23, 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/article/us-aid-israel-four-charts>.

10. "US-Israel Relations in the Wake of October 7." n.d. Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/us-israel-relations-wake-october-7>.

After Oct. 7, Israel sought additional military assistance from the United States. In a speech in the Oval Office on Oct. 19, President Biden announced an emergency supplemental budget request to support U.S. partners, including Ukraine, Israel, and other nations. The president specifically sought \$14.3 billion in support for Israel.¹¹ The House and Senate deliberated on their respective versions of supplemental appropriations legislation over three months. In early Feb. 2024, the House and Senate revealed revised supplemental appropriations legislation, aligning with the president's request for the total amount (including extra defence funds for artillery and munitions). Additionally, an extra \$2.5 billion for the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) designated for Israel in fiscal year 2024 was included, contingent on the Secretary of State determining and informing Congress that the activation of this authority is a response to the situation in Israel.¹² The bill would provide \$14.3 billion in supplemental appropriations related to Israel, includes:

- \$4.4 billion for the Department of Defense's response to the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza and related expenditures;
- \$801.4 million to purchase ammunition for the U.S. Army to respond to the situation in Israel;
- \$4 billion in Department of Defence funding for the Iron Dome and David's Sling defence systems;
- \$3.5 billion in Foreign Military Financing, of which \$769.3 million is designated for Overseas Procurement. However, this number "may be exceeded, if agreed between the United States and Israel, after consultation with the Appropriations Committees." The Senate bill would also authorise the Secretary of State to waive notification to Congress of foreign military financing funds outlined in the bill "if the Secretary of State determines that doing so is in the national security interest of the United States";
- \$1.2 billion in Defence Department funding for the "Iron Beam" laser-based defence system being developed by Israel.
- \$100 million to the State Department to protect global security and respond to the situation in Israel.¹³

In Dec. 2023, the Biden administration notified Congress of proposed sales to Israel of tank cartridges (\$106.5 million) and artillery shells (\$147.5 million). In both instances, the weapons were dispatched to Israel utilising the authority of a "state of emergency," enabling the president to take action without Congressional review, citing "threats to the national security of the United States" as the justification. The U.S. administration's moves regarding arms sales to Israel sparked widespread criticism among Congress Democratic members. Some MPs believe that the Biden administration should not write a blank check to the right-wing government and help them kill more civilians. In addition, transferring weapons without approval from Congress undermines the principle of transparency and weakens accountability.¹⁴ The U.S. Department of Defence indicated that the sales that were made were from the stock maintained by the U.S. in Israel, known as the War Reserve Stockpile of Allies of Israel (WRSA-I),¹⁵ that Israel previously used in its 2006 war against Hezbollah and its military operation in Gaza in 2014.¹⁶

Furthermore, the United States has provided more than five thousand MK-84 bombs, a type of 2,000-pound bomb, as of late Dec. 2023, and also sent 280 cargo planes and 40 ships to deliver 25,000 tons of artillery shells and armoured vehicles besides essential combat tools to Israel.¹⁷ The White House pressured the American defence industries to accelerate the current Israeli orders for weapons. Boeing accelerated the delivery of the Joint Direct Attack Munition

11. فرانس 24 (2023). «الرئيس الأمريكي يطلب من الكونغرس تمويلًا عاجلاً» لدعم إسرائيل وأوكرانيا». 2023.

12. Senate Appropriations Committee, "Murray Releases Text of Bipartisan National Security Supplemental," February 2024, 4.

13. Israel and Hamas Conflict in Brief: Overview, U.S. Policy, and Options for Congress.

14. Gangitano, A., & Weaver, A. (2024, January 4). The Hill. *The Hill*. <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/4387824-senate-democrats-scoff-at-bidens-israel-arms-sale/>

15. Israel – 155mm artillery ammunition | Defense Security Cooperation Agency. (n.d.). <https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/israel-155mm-artillery-ammunition>

16. Stewart, P. (2014, July 31). U.S. defends supplying Israel ammunition during Gaza conflict. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN0G0221/>

17. Calcalist, Y. S. (2024, January 29). Global ammunition shortage forces Israel to limit bombings. *Ynetnews*. <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/h1wplmcp>

(JDAM) deal, previously contracted by Israel in 2021. But the request comes at a time of increasing pressure on the defence industrial base, which could hinder efforts to increase deliveries to Israel.¹⁸

The Biden administration also deployed additional American military equipment and personnel in the Middle East to support Israel and deter Iran and the groups it supports from expanding the war. This included stationing USS Bataan Amphibious Group and the USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier in the Eastern Mediterranean, the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier group in the Red Sea, and the guided missile destroyers USS Carney and USS Gravelly in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, enabling the U.S. to regularly intercept Houthi missiles.

The ongoing conflict also gave Israel a golden opportunity to complete a purchase deal including (25 F-35I aircraft, 25 F-15IA aircraft) and one squadron of 12 Apache helicopters through the American aid fund.¹⁹

What is Behind U.S. Military Support for Israel?

Over the past decades, Washington's support has been enormous both in quantity and quality, turning Israel into a military force to be reckoned with in the region. In the agreement covered by the current memorandum of understanding signed in 2016, Washington plans to provide military aid to Israel worth \$38 billion. It pursues an active policy that seeks to ensure that Israel always enjoys a qualitative military edge²⁰ over its opponents in the region. For example, Israel was the first country to receive American-made F-35 fighter jets, the most advanced in the world, and the United States helped finance and produce the Iron Dome, Israel's anti-missile defence system.

The Most Notable Reasons Behind the Continuation of Military Aid to Israel includes:

Political Reasons

- The United States and Israel share common values and democratic interests and tend to strengthen alliances and cooperation in combating terrorism. In numerous instances, American officials have portrayed the United States' commitment to Israel as a moral imperative, emphasising Israel's status as a democratic state contending for its survival. This commitment is rooted in the United States' self-assigned role as a guardian and advocate of democracy worldwide.
- Over the first 20 years following Israel's victory in the 1967 war, a trend in the American administration viewed Israel as a militarily strong enough country to play a stabilising role in American foreign policy circles, especially during the Reagan administration. The Gulf War demonstrated once again that Israel proved it was a great asset rather than an obstacle. Israeli air technology was incorporated into the allies' bombing of Iraqi missile sites and other targets; Israeli mobile bridges were used by U.S. Marines, and the American helicopters used Israeli targeting systems and low-altitude warning devices. Moreover, Israel developed vital components of the widely used Tomahawk missiles.
- This support was yet another reminder of how Israel remains, in the eyes of American policymakers, a significant strategic ally. This cooperation provides multiple benefits to American defence contractors, and this is reinforced by the fact that every major arms transfer to Israel creates a new demand on the part of Arab countries for access to additional American weapons to challenge Israel.
- The United States views Israel as a stable and reliable partner in a region characterised by conflicts and turmoil. By supporting Israel militarily, the United States aims to promote regional stability to advance its security interests. Israeli military strength is seen as a deterrent to potential enemies, which indirectly benefits American interests in the region.

18. Knutson, J. (2023, November 4). What to know about U.S. aid to Israel. *Axios*. <https://www.axios.com/2023/11/04/us-israel-aid-military-funding-chart>

19. Harel, A., & Samuels, B. (2024, January 25). U.S. and Israel finalize major military aircraft deals amid Gaza war. *Haaretz.com*. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-01-25/ty-article/.premium/u-s-and-israel-finalize-major-military-aircraft-deals-amid-gaza-war/0000018d-4234-d35c-a39f-ea7e5b8c0000>

20. U.S. military aid to Israel is designed to maintain Israel's "qualitative military superiority" over neighboring militaries. The rationale for qualitative military superiority is that Israel must rely on better equipment and training to compensate for being much smaller in terms of land area and population than most of its potential adversaries.

- U.S. support for Israel has helped foster a strong political alliance between the two countries. This alliance grants the United States substantial influence over the region's Israeli policies and decision-making processes. It allows the United States to advance its interests and maintain a strong presence in the Middle East, as was evident in the effect of American pressure on Israel to withdraw from southern Lebanon in 2000, which eased tensions with Hezbollah.
- The American-Israeli lobby, consisting of influential interest groups and supporters of Israel, plays a role in shaping the American foreign policy toward Israel. Politicians view support for Israel as essential in obtaining support from certain constituencies within the United States.
- The American-Israeli alliance helped stimulate closer American-Arab relations at times, propelled by the theory that only the United States could convince Israel to make concessions in negotiations. This rationale was evident in Egypt's pivot away from the Soviet Union toward the United States in the seventies, and it continues to influence diplomatic strategies, even in the recent decade marked by close cooperation between the United States and Israel.

Security Reasons

- Security cooperation between the United States and Israel dates back to the height of the Cold War. In that era, Israel came to be seen as a bulwark against the Soviet influence in the Middle East and a counterforce to Arab nationalism. Although the world has changed since then, the strategic logic of the American-Israeli alliance has not. Israel remained a counterweight against extremist forces in the Middle East, including political Islam. It prevented any further spread of weapons of mass destruction in the region by thwarting the nuclear programmes in Syria and Iraq.
- Israel continues to help the United States deal with traditional security threats. Both countries exchange intelligence on terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and Middle East politics. In addition, Israeli military experiences have shaped the United States' approach to counterterrorism and homeland security.
- Leveraging the sophistication of the Israeli military research and development, pioneering many cutting-edge technologies transforming modern warfare, including cyber weapons, unmanned vehicles (such as ground robots and drones), sensors and electronic warfare systems, and advanced military defence vehicles.

Strategic Reasons

There is broad bipartisan consensus in the United States that Israel advanced American strategic interests in the Middle East and beyond through:

- Israel's success in preventing the victories of extremist nationalist movements in Lebanon and Jordan, as well as in Palestine, where Israel kept Syria, an ally of the Soviet Union, under the control of the Israeli Air Force for many years.
- Israel's recurring wars provided field tests for American weapons, often against Soviet weapons.
- Israel served as a conduit for the transfer of American weapons to regimes and movements that were too unpopular in the United States to be granted direct military aid publicly. Examples include the apartheid regime in South Africa, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the junta in Guatemala, and the Contra Front in Nicaragua. Moreover, the Israeli military advisors helped the Contras, the Salvadoran military junta, and foreign occupation forces in Namibia.
- The Mossad assisted the United States in intelligence gathering and covert operations.
- Israel also possesses missiles capable of reaching areas as far away as the former Soviet Union, possesses a nuclear arsenal that includes hundreds of weapons, and has cooperated with the American military-industrial complex in research and development of new jet fighters and anti-missile defence systems.
- The United States maintains military bases and facilities in Israel, which serve as strategic assets for the U.S. military operations in the Middle East. These bases provide the United States with advanced operational capability and rapid access to the region, enabling rapid response to crises and force projection if necessary.

Economic Reasons

- Trade between the two countries was worth \$51.1 billion in 2022 due to the elimination of tariffs in accordance with the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Agreement, enhancing market access.
- Dozens of leading American companies established technology incubators in Israel to capitalise on the country's penchant for new ideas. Bill Gates noted in 2006 that "the innovation taking place in Israel is critical to the future of technology businesses." Likewise, Israeli tech companies often turn to American companies as partners for coproduction and marketing opportunities in the United States and elsewhere, creating tens of thousands of American jobs.
- Both governments are working together to develop advanced military technology, such as the David's Sling anti-missile system and the Arrow missile defence systems, which will be exported to other U.S. allies. Israel has also emerged as an essential defence supplier to the U.S. military, with sales rising from \$300 million annually before 9/11 to \$1.1 billion in 2006 due to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, the 2023 Memorandum of Understanding obligates the United States to provide \$3.8 billion in annual military aid to Israel, primarily benefiting American defence companies such as Lockheed Martin and Boeing.
- Cooperation between American companies and Israel in information technology has resulted in Silicon Valley's success at Intel's R&D centres in Israel; engineers designed many of the company's most successful microprocessors.
- Israeli innovators also found new solutions to water and food security challenges posed by population growth, climate change and economic development. Moreover, some Israeli companies are developing renewable energy sources. For example, BrightSource Industries is building a solar power plant in California using Israeli technology that would double the amount of solar thermal electricity produced in America. These innovations, supported by significant U.S. investments in Israel, contribute to achieving long-term U.S. domestic and foreign policy goals regarding sustainable development.²¹

U.S. Tools to Pressure Israel

The United States possesses essential tools it can use to pressure Israel. It could, for example, threaten to cut off military aid to the country, stop defending it at the UN, or abandon long-term efforts to help it normalise diplomatic relations with the Arab countries. Some Democrats in Congress are even considering legislation to limit intelligence sharing with Israel. For example, the Ronald Reagan administration banned the transfer of cluster munitions to Israel for several years in the 1980s after determining that Israel had used them against civilian targets in its invasion of Lebanon. In a recent example, the Biden administration withheld a planned shipment of U.S.-made assault rifles to Israel in Dec. 2023 over concerns that the weapons would end up in the hands of extremist Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

The United States Has Previously Taken Measures to Pressure Israel in Various Events, Most Notably:

Event	American action toward Israel
The tripartite aggression of 1956	The United States pressured Israel, France, and the United Kingdom to withdraw from the Egyptian territories after invading it following the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Although the pressure did not stop aid directly, it created significant tension and prompted Israel to withdraw, which arguably had a similar effect.
June 1967 war	Delaying the delivery of some military equipment, especially F-4 Phantom fighter aircraft, to avoid war escalation.

21. Eisenstadt, Michael, and David Pollock. (2012). "Friends With Benefits: Why the U.S.-Israeli Alliance Is Good for America." The Washington Institute. November 7, 2012. Accessed February 18, 2024. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/friends-benefits-why-us-israeli-alliance-good-america>.

Event	American action toward Israel
The “re-evaluation crisis” of 1975	President Ford temporarily suspended shipments of arms as a “reassessment” of relations after Israel rejected a U.S.-backed proposal for further withdrawal from Sinai, and the aid resumed after Israel agreed to a disengagement agreement with Egypt.
Lebanon War of 1982	Congress briefly delayed approving more military aid as a sign of discontent in the wake of civilian deaths due to the Israeli bombing of Beirut.
The case of American Jonathan Pollard spying for Mossad in 1992	The United States temporarily withheld \$1 billion in loan guarantees to access Israeli intelligence information over the case of spy Jonathan Pollard.
Comprehensive reduction in 2003	The United States implemented a 0.7% reduction in all programs, including military aid to Israel, as part of an overall reduction in foreign aid due to budget constraints. However, the reduction was not directed at Israel in particular, and was relatively small.
Gaza War in 2014	Concerns about civilian casualties during the conflict have led to some temporary delays in the delivery of some military equipment, similar to the 1982 incident.

The above cases involved specific contexts and circumstances that led to temporary interruptions or delays, not a complete and prolonged halt to the annual \$3.8 billion military aid package. In addition, there have been proposals in the U.S. Congress to impose conditions or potentially cut off aid based on human rights concerns or other actions. Still, these proposals have not received sufficient support to pass and become law. In addition, the nature and duration of aid pauses varied widely.

The United States has the capability to exploit the events of 1975 to pressure Israel to accept its conditions and map that were agreed upon for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and to stop planning for the ground invasion of Rafah, which portends a severe humanitarian catastrophe. However, the United States did not freeze current aid, and Washington did not respond. In fact, despite pleas to scale back aid, it has facilitated faster delivery of specific munitions and provided additional postwar financial aid due to the Biden administration’s firm rejection of such moves.

What’s Next?

The Biden administration is currently grappling with renewed challenges surrounding the question of whether the United States should condition its military support for Israel. Some argue that such assistance should be provided in the form of grants or possibly loans, given the perception that Israel is economically robust and capable of shouldering its burdens in times of conflict. The other challenge is that the United States is incapable of preventing Israel from resuming military action in Rafah or launching a major military campaign aimed at uprooting Hamas’ infrastructure and killing its leaders in the south, for example. The Israeli government did not listen to Washington in times of peace when American officials urged Israel for years to stop building settlements on West Bank lands claimed by the Palestinians. Moreover, when President Biden was vice president under President Barack Obama, the Israeli government announced the construction of new settlements, and U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken directed a final warning to the Israeli government regarding dealing with the Palestinian civilian population in all military operations. His purpose was to reduce the displacement of civilians to a minimum, stop denying entry and distribution of humanitarian aid, and begin allocating more safe areas in which Palestinian civilians could seek refuge from the continuous bombing.²² Additionally, the support provided by the United States and the ineffectiveness of the United Nations in the absence of consensus among its members are the two main factors that allow Israel to act against the political will of the international community.

22. Simon, Steven, and Aaron David Miller. (2023). “Grading Biden’s Israel-Hamas War Response.” *Foreign Policy*, December 1, 2023. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/12/01/biden-israel-hamas-war-policy-approach-response-criticism/>.

The current situation points to two possible scenarios for the American response toward Israel, the worst of which is bitter for both parties. Suppose the United States decides to withdraw the American air defence radar from the Negev desert in Israel. In that case, it will confront a dilemma concerning deterring Hezbollah and Iran from potential escalation. This action could be perceived as aligning with Iran's interests. Moreover, if the United States calls in the U.S. Marine Rapid Response Force, whose missions include evacuating embassies and countries, rescuing hostages, and other special operations, it would undermine U.S. preparedness for any number of emergencies, and if it votes against Israel at the U.N., the United States will lose an ally it has nurtured for seven decades. The second option is for Washington to submit a draft resolution to the U.N. Security Council supporting a temporary ceasefire in Gaza as soon as possible to curb the disobedience of the Israeli government and stop its planned operations in Rafah. This is an unlikely option given the United States' opposition to the draft resolutions presented, where it used its veto for the third time in Feb. 2024.

Therefore, increased American support for the Israeli government, like American support for its allies around the world, is not driven primarily by objective security needs or a strong moral commitment to those countries. It will remain driven by the promotion of American strategic interests, as the Israeli arms race has become a reward for manufacturers of U.S. weapons, which may be a major explanation for U.S. aid policy. The United States is indifferent to the human rights violations claims, and such indifference is manifested by supporting and funding Israel militarily. In the past, military aid to Indonesia continued during the Clinton administration, and it did not show any remorse about its continuation despite Indonesia's occupation of East Timor. Like Israel, U.S. allies seriously violating human rights continue to occupy neighbouring countries in defiance of Security Council resolutions and defiance of the whole world.



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