

U.S. AID AND ASSISTANCE TO ISRAEL POST-OCTOBER 7, 2023

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In the aftermath of the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, the Biden Administration announced its support to Israel in the form of a \$105 billion national security package that included military and humanitarian assistance for Israel and Ukraine. Out of \$105 billion, \$14.3 billion -- as supplementary funding -- was meant to provide security support to Israel, release of hostages, a humanitarian aid to Israel and Gaza,¹ replenish Israel's stockpile of interceptors for its Iron Dome missile-defence system, artillery shells, and other munitions. The assistance further included support for air and missile defense, investments in the industrial base, and replenishment of U.S. stocks used to aid Israel. This aid intended to improve Israel's readiness in air and missile defence systems and help with the procurement and development of various missile defence components. Additionally, \$3.7 billion in aid and assistance continued under the Ten Year Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. and Israel enhancing Israel's military capabilities and security, while approximately \$3.3 billion aid is given to Israel every year to purchase arms from the U.S. and Israeli companies.

¹ Jacob Krutson, "What to know about U.S. aid to Israel," *Axios*, November 4, 2023, <https://www.axios.com/2023/11/04/us-israel-aid-military-funding-chart>

More recently, in April 2024, the Biden Administration approved an additional \$95 billion assistance package for Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan. Out of this package, \$26 billion would go to Israel² and \$9.15 billion in humanitarian assistance to Gaza and the West Bank, along with Ukraine.

Implications of US Military Support to Israel

Decades of military aid and assistance to Israel by the U.S. have significantly shaped Israel's strategic positioning in the Middle East. It has not only strengthened Israel's military muscle but also accentuated the power asymmetry in the region and sparked an arms race in the region. The evolution of American arms transfer policies, particularly within the last decade, has emerged as a significant concern within the region and beyond as it reinforces Israel's military supremacy.

The U.S. attempt to preserve Israel's military superiority through military aid and assistance and security alliances has forced the Middle East region to emerge as a security centric bloc. The proposed sale of F-16 aircraft and mobile I-Hawk missile systems to Jordan, alongside the provision of F-15 fighter jets and Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft to Saudi Arabia, combined with the acquisition of advanced Soviet weaponry by Syria, have introduced a sense of threat and danger in the region as it becomes increasingly weaponised.

The extensive U.S. military assistance to Israel has several implications, both for the countries involved as well as the broader Middle East:

- **Regional Security Dynamics:** The assistance to Israel has a significant impact on regional security dynamics by building Israel's military capabilities, along with unconditional political support by the United States.
- **Domestic Political Considerations:** U.S. military aid to Israel in the recent past has been a contentious issue domestically. While it enjoys broad bipartisan support, some vocal critics argue that the aid package should be conditional on Israel's adherence to certain policies, such as settlements in the West Bank, invasion of Rafah in southern Gaza without a civilian protection plan, concerns about civilian casualties and the humanitarian crisis, and easy delivery of food and other supplies into Gaza.³ Many in Washington have called upon the

² "US Senate passes Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan bill; Biden to sign on Wednesday," *Al-Jazeera*, April 24, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/24/us-senate-passes-ukraine-israel-taiwan-bill-biden-to-sign-on-wednesday#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20Senate%20has,as%20soon%20as%20this%20week.>

³ Biden Steps Up Pressure On Israel – Using The Key Levers Available Against An Ally With Strong domestic Support," *Conversation*, April 5, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/biden-steps-up-pressure-on-israel-using-the-key-levers-available-against-an-ally-with-strong-domestic-support-227210>

Biden administration to subject U.S. security assistance to greater scrutiny after the Israeli strike on a World Central Kitchen aid convoy.⁴

- **Diplomatic and Peace Efforts:** The assistance also impacts peace efforts in the Middle East. It is often a point of contention between Israel and its neighbours, who view the military support as enabling Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories.
- **Technological Advancements:** Collaboration on military technologies has yielded technological advancements and economic benefits for both countries. Israel has become a hub for U.S. defence technology and innovation -- a prime example of which is the Iron dome technology.

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

The BDS movement, which stands for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, is a non-violent human rights initiative led by Palestinians. It is aimed at encouraging the refusal of Israeli products made in illegally occupied Palestinian territories. The movement started in 2005 and is modelled on the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. It demands 'respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties.'⁵

Nearly 27 states in the U.S. have implemented anti-BDS laws as Israel paints the movement as anti-Semitic and blames it for the rise in discrimination against Jews.⁶ The movement has spread to Europe, like in France where criminal charges have been introduced against the promotion of Israeli boycotts.⁷ Twenty-seven states in the U.S. have adopted anti-boycott laws and policies that could punish companies and individuals for refusing to trade with illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank or with Israel in general.

Individuals in the U.S. are often required to sign certificates that they will not engage in any activity that boycotts Israel or its settlements and lose income. This has been challenged by groups like the American Civil Liberties Union by arguing that it is compromising the freedom of speech of American

⁴ Amy Mackinnon, "Iran's Attack Complicates Efforts to Condition U.S. Military Aid to Israel," *Foreign Policy*, April 15, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/04/15/iran-attack-israel-us-conditional-aid/>

⁵ Charles Tripp, "The Power and The People: Paths of Resistance In the Middle East," *Cambridge University Press*, 2013, pp. 125, https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=zrGO6R7pMnsC&pg=PA125&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁶ Ben White, "Delegitimizing Solidarity: Israel Smears Palestine Advocacy as Anti-Semitic," *Journal for Palestine Studies*, Institute for Palestine Studies, 2020, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1649970#>

⁷ JTA, "French High Court: BDS Activists Guilty of Discrimination," *Time of Israel*, October 23, 2015, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/french-high-court-bds-activists-guilty-of-discrimination/>

citizens.⁸ The increasing intolerance for any action against Israel's illegal actions and international law violations is encouraging and aiding discrimination against Muslims in American societies. According to a survey carried out by Pew Research, 70 percent American Muslims believe that discrimination against Muslims has increased since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.⁹

In recent months, majority of the Americans have disapproved of Israel's actions in Gaza. According to a recent Gallup poll conducted from March 1-20, 55 percent of U.S. adults said they disapproved of Israel's military actions — a jump of 10 percentage points from four months earlier.¹⁰ Similarly, President Biden's approval rating has significantly declined due to the handling of the crisis by his administration. In February 2023, President Biden stated that the U.S. would not provide arms to anyone who could potentially use them to violate human rights.¹¹ The Biden Administration has been repeatedly criticized for applying this to Middle Eastern countries but not to Israel, which has been taken to the International Court of Justice for committing genocide in Gaza.

Due to the rising domestic pressure, the Biden Administration has slightly diverged from its strong support for Israel. There is a growing understanding in the U.S. for making strategic adjustments in the U.S. policy approaches to Israel where military assistance is involved. Many in the U.S. policy circles believe that failing to place any conditions on Israel would provide an opportunity for other aid recipients to disregard U.S. aid conditions. By endorsing Israel's military operations in Gaza and failing to exercise effective oversight of U.S. military assistance, Washington is essentially undercutting the Foreign Assistance Act, the Arms Export Act, and the Leahy Laws, all of which obligate the recipients of U.S. military assistance to meet human rights standards.¹²

⁸ "US: States Use Anti-Boycott Laws To Punish Responsible Businesses," *Human Rights Watch*, April 23, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/23/us-states-use-anti-boycott-laws-punish-responsible-businesses>

⁹ Besheer Mohamed, "How U.S. Muslims are experiencing the Israel-Hamas war," Pew Research Center, April 2, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/02/how-us-muslims-are-experiencing-the-israel-hamas-war/>

¹⁰ Anushka Patil, "MAJORITY Of AMERICANS DISAPPROVE Of ISRAEL'S ACTIONS In GAZA, NEW POLL SHOWS, New York Times, March 27, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/27/world/middleeast/military-action-americans-gaza.html>

¹¹ "Memorandum On United States Conventional Arms Transfer Policy," *White House*, February 23, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/02/23/memorandum-on-united-states-conventional-arms-transfer-policy/>

¹² Bilal Y. Saab, Washington Should condition Us Aid to Israel – Regardless of What Happens in Rafah," *Chatham House*, May 15, 2024, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/05/washington-should-condition-us-aid-israel-regardless-what-happens-rafah>

Conclusion

U.S. aid and assistance to Israel has evolved over the past many decades, significantly impacting the Middle East's geopolitical landscape. Unconditionally U.S. military support to Israel has emboldened it to exercise actions that are manifestly against international law and has helped it create the capacity to wage unjust wars. While its implications are complex, they underscore the intricate interplay of political, military, and diplomatic factors in the region. The repercussions of Israel's military superiority in the Middle East are complex and multifaceted contributing to threat instability in the region. This continues to perpetuate the cycle of violence and conflict in Gaza.